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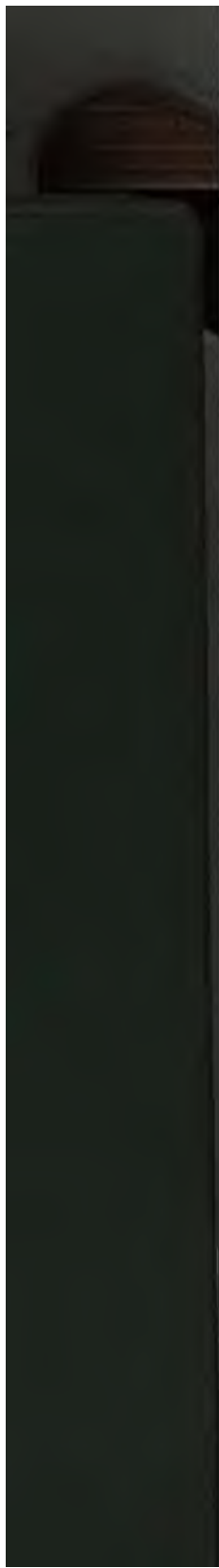
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Laughlin
N.B.



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FELICITY







She was playing her dual rôle in *Marianna*.

See page 145.



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FELICITY

The Making of a Comédienne

BY

CLARA E. LAUGHLIN

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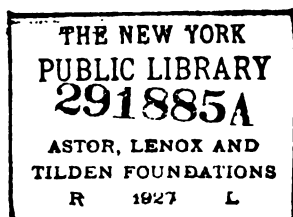
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M. S. W.



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OF NEW
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TO
LONELY FOLK,
ON THE HEIGHTS OR OTHERWHERE.



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PART I

OPENING IN MILLVILLE, MASS., IN JUNE, 1869





FELICITY

CHAPTER I

"THE PRINCE OF VAGABONDS"

"IT'S too bad, father, to thrust 'the shop' at you the very first day of your vacation, but you know you needn't go to the play if you don't feel equal to it. The boys'll be disappointed, if you don't, but they didn't really get this show up for your benefit, though, of course, they'll be glad to have you as guest of honor."

Mrs. Allston made her little, laughing apology with the air of one who knew it would be handsomely received. She was a pleasant-faced young woman, spoiled for beauty by the tendency of her large, pale eyes to be of the variety her father called "hard boiled" and by the wide mouth like his; yet attractive in no small degree because of the animation in her countenance and in her manner.

"If it will bore you the least bit in the world," she went on, "to sit in the barn for an hour and watch your grandsons enact some 'bloogy' vil-

Felicity

lany, you mustn't think of doing it—just to be polite.”

“Nonsense! you know I'm never so polite as to let myself be bored. And the theatre never bores me. Let's see the play, by all means. What's it to be—Robinson Crusoe?”

“Not today; that's a favorite bill—perhaps the favorite bill—but the leading lady balks at too much of it. She's never been able to induce the boys to admit a Mrs. Crusoe, and has had to content herself with playing the cannibals *en masse*. You will see her today in her greatest rôle—Mary, Queen of Scots. She's fine as Queen Philippa, sucking the poison from the wound of her Crusading king; but, after all, that's only one scene, you know, and beyond that there's nothing in the part. And we've put a ban on Joan of Arc ever since Adams got so worked up, as executioner, as to apply a real match to the faggot-pile. There's to be 'executing' today, of course, but I hardly apprehend any catastrophes; I made the dreadful axe myself—out of cardboard, pasted over with silver paper—and I can guarantee its safety in the most frenzied hands.”

“Who wields the axe?”

“Morton; he's never had an 'executing part' before, and he's very proud. Adams has always seized the most bloodthirsty parts for himself, but there was trouble over the last show, in which

"The Prince of Vagabonds"

Adams did a lot of 'tommyhawking,' as they call it, and Morton had to be 'tommyhawked,' so the chopping, they tell me, falls to Morton today."

"I'd hate to be Queen Mary, and suffer the full fervor of that pent-up longing to slay!"

"Oh, Queen Mary likes ardent slaying; 'there's naught that's timorous' about her, as you'll see."

"And who is this young person 'of virtues and of talents all compact'?"

"Our next-door neighbor, Felicity Fergus."

"What! A New England child called Felicity? I've heard of 'em called Prudence and Content and Charity, and all the meek virtues, but I never thought to hear one called Happiness. I should think that, in New England, such a name would be considered tempting Providence."

"She's not all New England. I'll tell you about her later; there's a story back of her. Just now I've got to get out a sheet I've promised for a curtain, and attend to other things 'not equally made glorious by the claims of art.' In about twenty minutes we'll proceed to the play, if you're so inclined."

"Methinks, me lady, I could not well be otherwise, after all you've told me."

Mrs. Allston shook her father gently by the shoulders as she passed him on her way out of the room.

"Ah, but it's good to have you here!" she



Felicity

cried. "You don't know how delicious the old, stage nonsense talk seems to me, after months of prosaic speaking. I've wondered, a thousand times, what would happen if I were to unloose a little of our dear old foolishness on these staid new neighbors of mine. They've expected something queer of an actor's daughter, and I've fairly itched to give it to 'em. But it wouldn't do; one can't be queer and comfortable, and I've chosen conformity and comfort. While you're here, though, I feel as if I wanted to babble the nonsense of the wise you taught me, all the time."

Her father pulled her face down to his and tweaked her ears caressingly.

"I'm afraid we didn't give you a very good raising for a work-a-day world, my dear. I've often thought of that, and wondered if I oughtn't to regret it."

"Don't you ever, again!" was the happy response. "I wouldn't take the wealth of Ind for my blessedly peculiar training. I only hope I can pass some measure of it on to the boys."

After his daughter was gone Phineas Morton sat reflecting, whimsically, on what she had just suggested to him rather than told him—the novelty of his situation lending lively color to his thoughts.

Getting up, he walked to the window and looked out at Federal Street, squinting quizzically at it

“The Prince of Vagabonds”

as it stretched its prim length under a brilliant June sky.

Hands deep in trousers pockets, the old man studied the unaccustomed vista. As well as if he had had magic sight, he could see the life that went on behind those staid house fronts; as well, almost, as if he had had the scales of final appraisal, he could estimate the character that was shaping itself to type in those orderly dwellings.

It was a strange place for Fate to set down his child. It was a strange place for Fate to put him, hailed the prince of all vagabond players, for a vacation. He wanted to visit with Frances and her children, but he doubted his ability to breathe Millville air for a month. When the fret of the road was on him he had thought the New England village quiet promised peace. But when the peace he had never learned to enjoy lay at hand, the life-long habit of the road would not yield to exorcism, and although he had arrived in Millville but that morning, he was already irked with its unwontedness.

His daughter had been here only a few months, brought hither by a change in her husband's business interests, and this was his first visit to her new home. Her mother had died, early in the year, and old Phineas felt impelled, in his loneliness, to seek the comfort of kith and kin rather than the distractions of Europe, where they had spent their



Felicity

summers—he and “Ma”—for many years. But his heart misgave him about Millville, at this very outset.

“It’s the price of the game,” he soliloquized, “that there’s no let-up to it. When you begin, you’ve got to go on—to the end. Nature doesn’t provide any peaceful old age for mummers, with their curse of the wandering foot. Peaceful old age is for these folks, behind their green shutters and fan-light doors. Ah, well! I’m satisfied. Let me die with my boots on, having known the joy of the road!”

The celebrated comedian was a spare little man with agility still indicated in every move, despite his sixty-four years. His complexion was delicately ruddy; his thin hair had turned almost imperceptibly from ashen blond to silver and was now scarce lighter than it had always been; and his wide-apart, pale-blue eyes were so deep-set that they frequently, especially from a distance and when glowing with strong feeling, gave the effect of being dark. They were rather small eyes, but Phineas was wont to observe that Nature had more than made up to him in the size of his mouth and his nose and his ears. The latter were the big, generous ears of the big, generous nature. The nose had that size supposed to be inevitable with men of strong character. “If I,” said Phineas, “had lived a few years earlier, the stage would have lost me: the Duke o’ Welling-

“The Prince of Vagabonds”

ton—for whom the boots are named, y’ know!—would have seized me for generalship in his army.” The Duke of Wellington, on the contrary, would have done no such thing; for if he was a student of physiognomy enough to know that men likely to prove good generals would have big noses—like his own—he must have been student enough to know that no man could have that mouth of Phineas’s and be a man of blood and battle. It was the mouth of the mime, but it was more than that—it was distinctively the mouth of the comedian. There was something in its great width, in the extreme length and mobility of the upper lip, in the tucking in at the corners, that spelled comedy to the least observing; there was something in the peculiar line of compression that the thin, tight-closing lips made, that was essentially not grim but humorous, not at all ascetic but full of the enjoyment of life. Sometimes, to amuse a child or a crony, he would cover all the upper part of his face with his hand, and with that wonderfully flexible mouth alone would run the gamut of characters and emotions so understandably that the littlest, least intelligent beholder would shout with glee and the oldest, most intelligent beholder would be lost in dumb amaze. Perhaps his mouth had not predestined him to comedy as he believed; perhaps a lifetime of smiles had altered, not confirmed, the natural habit of a mouth that might as easily have



Felicity

been trained to tragic utterance. But there was nothing equivocal about that mouth now. Withal, with that roundness of countenance which age had not worn upon, and that fairness of hair and blueness of eyes and delicate ruddiness of complexion, he had a delicious ability to simulate youthfulness, nay, childishness, so that when he pulled one of those sparse light locks down on his forehead and gave you an imitation of a little boy speaking a piece at a country-school exhibition, you had all you could do to remember, if, indeed, you cared to, that it was art and not nature you saw before you.

“Ready, father?” Mrs. Allston stood in the doorway. The sound of her voice breaking suddenly upon his revery made him remember, as he mused on “the joy of the road,” how he had, in his best wisdom at the time, opposed that joy for his daughter. Now, reckoning what heritage of unrest he had given her, and recoiling from the dozy peace of Millville, he wondered if he had not, perchance, done her an irreparable injury.

The play was in the barn and the price of admission was a penny—no pins taken for currency and no credit extended. A pass was offered the profession, but the profession declined it and bought a seat for a quarter, which was going ahead, he remarked, of the rates paid to hear Jenny Lind, nineteen years ago, or, more recently, to see the

“The Prince of Vagabonds”

farewell performance of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Kean.

Besides Phineas Morton and his daughter, there were present nine children and four women—one of the latter the star's aunt and the other three attracted by the rumor that the Allston boys' grandfather would be present. None of them would have gone to see him act, but they knew of no law against going to watch him “look on.”

The play was not Schiller's, Mrs. Allston explained when they were seated. The text used was the star's own dramatization of history.

“It seems Queen Mary is her favorite heroine, and that the story of the poor lady's sufferings has been told and retold to her till she knows it by heart. So she has constructed her own play, which may lack a little in conversation but will be very strong in action—only the bloodiest scenes being enacted.”

In scene one, the Queen was disclosed with Rizzio. As Morton was to be “the killer” in the great, final act, he was obliged to be killed in this act. He wore a complete suit of winter underwear, a pair of slippers, and a sword, and struck whanging chords, now and then, on a borrowed guitar whose owner, it was to be hoped, was not in the audience.

The queen wore a trailing robe of calico, tucked up in front, and a long veil of white mosquito



Felicity

netting pinned to her done-up hair. She sewed on a sampler which had once known the touch of her Puritan grandmother's dutiful little fingers, and cast now and then a glance, half shiveringly apprehensive, half impatiently managerial, toward the door where Darnley ought, with less delay, to be making his appearance.

Truth to tell, the play went a little slowly, while Darnley tarried and Mary sewed and Rizzio whanged the untuned guitar. But presently there was a noise of stamping feet and a clattering assault, the murder was accomplished and the murderer retreated, grinning sheepishly and pursued by the stricken queen's threat:

"I'll blow you up for this!"

The next act exploited a feature not known in any previous production by this company and made possible only by the extraordinarily heavy receipts. The Fourth of July being but six days distant and already prepared for by the "fore-handed," part of a package of hoarded firecrackers was set off under a tin can in an empty stall and Adams's voice was heard proclaiming, "I'm killed!" while the queen told Bothwell (same costume as Rizzio except for guitar) that "it serves him [Darnley] right."

In the grand finale Adams was to be the Earl of Shrewsbury, implacable representative of hate-inspired Elizabeth. He had but one line to say,

“The Prince of Vagabonds”

in lieu of a death warrant, which Felicity did not know how to counterfeit: when the death march reached the scene of execution, Adams was to point to that chopping-block on which the Allston logs were regularly reduced to kindling, and hiss:

“Unhappy queen! Behold your doom!”

But when they reached “the hall” he caught a glimpse of his grandfather, whose cheeks were still wet with the tears he had shed over the previous acts, and fearing they had been too frightfully realistic, Adams began to cry.

“Adams!” whispered the unhappy queen, “what’s the matter? Say your speech.” And she prompted him.

Snuffling miserably, the inexorable minister pointed to the scarred block and murmured his vengeful line. But worse was yet to come.

When the lovely, royal head, divested of its mosquito bar, was on the block, and shivers of real horror shook the juvenile part of the audience, Morton stood transfixed, the axe uplifted in his hands.

Nothing happening, the queen looked up, and martyrdom gave place to indignation on her face.

“Chop, Morton!” she adjured; “why don’t you chop? You wanted to be the killer; now why don’t you kill?”

Then, down went the meek eyes again, waiting



Felicity

the end, but trembling in the corners of the queen's mouth Phineas could see a heroically repressed smile of comic appreciation.

The children clapped, rather fearsomely, when the deadly blow had fallen; the ladies choked behind their handkerchiefs; but Phineas Morton roared loud and long and tears poured down his face like rain.

"I want to meet the star," he begged; "I never saw such dramatic instinct."

And when told that the star had never been to a theatre and had derived all her ideas of things theatrical from his grandsons, he was the more interested.

"She has always impersonated her favorite heroes and heroines," said her aunt, when questioned, "but all children do that, I suppose. I've almost never known her when she didn't play part after part by herself, with no audience but her other self, so to speak. But when the boys came, and she found that they liked to play, too, she was quick to absorb their knowledge of the theatre—to have a curtain and stage and definite acts, and try to play scenes instead of just vaguely playing *be* somebody."

"She's a born actress, if I don't miss my guess," said Phineas; and he was surprised that his remark did not bring the look of resentment he had expected from Amelia Fergus. Instead, she was all

“The Prince of Vagabonds”

eager interest and plied him with questions about acting as a career.

“I’ve always felt she was a remarkable child,” said Amelia, “and that some day she would show signs of special ability. When she does show an inclination, I intend that she shall have every encouragement.”

At this, Phineas, looking narrowly at the Yankee spinster and noting the tell-tale compression of her mouth, knew certainly that Amelia’s own inclination had been crossed and that, with the world-old passion of maturity for securing to youth those things itself has failed of, she would fight with all her strength for this child’s opportunity.

“But I wonder where the child’s parents are,” he mused, “and why this spare, spinsterly person is so passionate about her. I must ask Frances.”

Felicity herself, when presented, had little to say. She was shy of strangers at all times, and this afternoon was especially embarrassed by the failure of her players to enter into the spirit of their play. Like all children of extraordinarily lively imagination, she suffered a great deal, either of impatience or of chagrin, when the coaching and exhorting she gave her friends failed to work them up to anything like that vividness of pretence which came so easily to her.

Phineas knew how she felt; in all the years since he had suffered that way as a child, the feeling had



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never become a memory with him—every day brought its fresh experience of the hurt. Only, as the years went by, his wonderful grace of humor came more and more surely to his rescue, so that the net result of it all was neither bitterness nor self-pity, but a constant enrichment of that comedy sense which was his genius. He wondered if he could get from the child's chagrin any glint of that saving humor. If he could, he felt that he would need no further confirmation of his estimate of her.

So he shook her hand gravely when she was presented to him and entered into a conversation in which there was apparent no trace of grown-up condescension to a child.

"I'm afraid you're feeling a little bad because your players didn't do their best," he said, with a fine air of "we-artists-have-like-sorrows," "but you mustn't. You must remember that we all feel, at times, the same way about the people who play with us."

And then he told her, and the others standing 'round, of some funny things that had happened to famous stars as they travelled from place to place and played with resident stock companies. Sometimes the stock company had to rehearse a quite strange play very hurriedly, and ludicrous things happened when the star tried to play his finished impersonation in a company that stumbled, half-comprehendingly, through the other parts.

“The Prince of Vagabonds”

Listening, Felicity forgot her embarrassment and laughed heartily, her eyes shining with the excitement of that most delicious sensation that ever comes to any of us, young or old: the sensation of being comprehended, of having met a soul that's kin to ours and dreams our dreams.

“When,” asked Amelia, with tremulous eagerness, “ought one to begin getting ready for the stage?”

“As soon as one thinks of going on.”

“Not in childhood?”

“Not unless it's too late to begin in babyhood. If you had any thought of the stage for Felicity, here, I'd say, put her on at once and let her play for two or three years, to get used to the theatre. Then, about the time she begins to spindle out and get impossible for child parts, I'd put her to school and give her the broadest general education she'd take, with special attention to literature and the history of the drama. She must have elocution, too, and dancing, and music, if it's in her. Then she'll be ready to begin that grind of actual experience in which she'll learn to know life and how to reflect it. But don't forget health—lots of it—and never lose a chance to develop her pluck; she'll need all of that she can muster. And,” with a twinkle, “she needn't be at too much pains to accumulate freckles, or get round-shouldered, or lose her front teeth.”



Felicity

Amelia went home so evidently thoughtful that Mrs. Allston chided her father, gently, for what he had done.

"It would make less trouble for that poor soul," she said, "if you persuaded her to become a—what do they call it?—a Nihilist, and blow up the Czar. She knows no more of a stage career than she knows of life in Borrioboola-Gha—not so much, because they learn about that in the missionary society. She's always been taught that the theatre is a sink-hole of iniquity, and while she doesn't quite believe that now, she's as far from guessing any of the real truth about it, from estimating the strangeness of its life, as—as my pussy is!"

"Well, you know, Frances, I never proselytize for the stage—that I'm like most of those on it, I advise most of those off it to keep off. But, somehow, today I had a queer, tugging feeling when I watched that little, vivid thing, all fancy and fervor, and tried to imagine her, world without end, in Federal Street. I knew the road I've travelled would be a rocky road for her tender feet, but it came to me, all in a flash, how she would always be feeling passions which her little world would not share, any more than Adams and Morton shared her feeling for Queen Mary. And, suddenly, the joys of the rough old road seemed more than worth all its perils and pains, and I held out my hand to that little child, to come travel the world's



“The Prince of Vagabonds”

highway. Next time I see her,” he finished, whimsically, “ I’ll tell her not to come—that the road is full o’ big, black bears! ”

He rolled his eyes and assumed such an expression of terror that his daughter laughed away her misgivings, just as he had meant she should.

“ But me,” he went on, “ I’m so used to bears I get lonesome where there aren’t any. I suppose, for instance, there isn’t a poker game worth mentioning, nearer than Boston? ”

CHAPTER II

THE PAINS THAT NATURE WENT TO, TO PROVIDE AN EXTRAORDINARY TYPE

THE early tea, beloved of New England, was over in the Allston home. Fortunately, it disturbed no cherished habit of the guest, long accustomed to eat early and lightly before his evening's work.

The boys were playing in the street and in neighboring yards, and their father had gone back to the bank to put in some extra, undisturbed hours on matters of importance.

"Now," said Phineas, smoking his pipe comfortably on the front porch in the long, lingering dusk of nearly the longest day, "now tell me about little Felicity, and how a child ever got the name of Felicity in that awful house; it looks like a stray piece of a cotton mill."

"That's just what it is. It's not exactly stray, for it was put there with full intent, but it is really a piece of the Fergus mills, a mile away. Felicity's grandfather Fergus built the mills in the early fifties, not long before he died, and at the same

An Extraordinary Type

time he seems to have ordered a certain number of cubic feet of space enclosed for a home. The architecture, if one may call it that, is the same in the mills and in the home."

"Was he so fond of the mills he couldn't bear to be away from them, even when he slept? Or was it cheaper to build both alike?"

"Well, Millville lays it to the cheapness, but I gather, from what I'm told about it, that a good deal may be laid to sheer lack of imagination. I suppose it never occurred to the old man or to his wife that it could possibly matter what kind of a house one had so long as it was substantial and of sufficient size. They built the house on the same principle as the mills, I tell you: the sturdiest material obtainable at a reasonable price, enclosing space enough to meet their working requirements.

"I want you to see the inside of that house; it's a study. And I want you to meet Mrs. Fergus—though I don't see how it's to be brought about, because she knows you're an actor, and she'd as lief meet Apollyon. She won't have anything to do with me, partly because I'm an actor's child and partly because I'm a Unitarian. When we came here and I went to the little Unitarian church, she's reported to have said, 'Well, what else could any one expect?' I'm told she once got up and walked majestically out of church because a visiting

Felicity

preacher, too advanced in his views, quoted Emerson in the pulpit."

Mrs. Allston caught a twinkle in her father's eye, which told her he meant to force acquaintance with Jane Fergus by whatever assault or strategy the conditions of the defence seemed to require.

"Don't look too confident," she laughed; "you've never undertaken anything quite so difficult as that in your life."

"A terrible ogre, is she?"

"No; really a very good, kind woman, according to her lights, but her lights are dim; they don't reach any distance at all into the outer darkness that surrounds her way of thinking and living.

"You said you noticed the compression 'round Miss Amelia's mouth. People say her brother Robert, Felicity's father, had the same look, as if he had habitually, on opening his mouth to speak, shut it again on second thought, as safer. Jane Fergus is dominating, and everybody who comes in contact with her finds it less trouble to let her dominate than to oppose her. It seems Amelia was a clever girl, fond of reading and hungry for any kind of culture that would widen the span of her prison-house. When she was young she fell in love with a Unitarian preacher who knew Margaret Fuller and Emerson and Channing, and who lived in a world of intellectual delights that dazzled this poor Amelia with the promise of rare fellow-



An Extraordinary Type

ships. But when it came to the issue and she was bidden to choose between her preacher and all else that belonged to her, she hadn't the courage to emancipate herself. Poor thing! She'd never learned to call her soul her own. Later, she was pretty nearly excommunicated or burned for a witch, or whatever was the fashionable torture of the time, for reading the dissolute poets—Byron and Shelley in particular—and for trying to learn German, which was held to be the rapid road to materialism. After that, she gave up the struggle on her own behalf, but renewed it later in behalf of this child.

“The brother, Robert, had never struggled, but he was like most persons who have repressed and repressed: he had a lot of stored-up energy that was bound to burst forth some time, and it did. When he was nearly forty he fell in love, and then there was no holding him back any more.

“He went abroad for the first time, in the summer of '59, and in Edinburgh fell in with a Scotch-American named McClintock, who was travelling with his daughter, Cecile. This girl was about eighteen, a sunny, irresponsible, law-unto-herself little creature, the only child of a Scotch Presbyterian father and a French Catholic mother—a kind of union not uncommon in their part of the world, I'm told.

“They lived in Mississippi, where Mr. McClin-

Felicity

tock owned a big cotton plantation just south of Vicksburg. Mrs. McClintock was quite recently dead, and Mr. McClintock was trying to find comfort in a tour of his boyhood haunts—the first since he had left them to go to the new world.

“There couldn’t possibly have been a more impossible thing than that staid Robert Fergus should have fallen madly in love with this child of the slave-owning South, but Fate must have been in an ironical mood, for that poor, rigid Round-head, who had never been young, seems no more than to have laid eyes on this capricious little daughter of the gay, Cavalier South, than he became willing to defy the whole world, his mother included, to get her.”

“Of course! Nothing could be more inevitable.”

“What surprises me, though, is that she was persuaded to take him.”

“Not at all; I know that type of child, and I don’t doubt that all she needed to make her declare for Fergus, in the face of all odds, was one little suggestion that she ought never to do so. There’s no obstinacy on earth like the obstinacy of a woman born and bred as she was. You can’t assail it, because it never comes into the open to fight; and you can’t overwhelm it, because it thrives and increases on opposition.”

“Well, whatever the reason, she took it into her

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head that Fergus was the man for her, and her father, when he saw how things were, gave himself up to the situation with a great deal of good grace, I'm told. Of course, Fergus was a Northerner, but he was a Scotchman——"

"And McClintock, very probably, had learned to esteem Scotch staidness in his long association with the men of his region. God knows I love the Cavalier, even if he's a scamp and a vagabond! But when it comes to marrying your daughter to a man you think of more than your personal preferences. McClintock may easily have been not quite inconsolable to give his little, winsome, wilful child to a man who, whatever else he might be or not be, would be true to her to his last breath."

"But I'll warrant you can't see how Jane Fergus could be less than inconsolable to give her rigidly-raised son to the daughter of a slave-owning French Catholic! Why, they say Mrs. Fergus was the hottest Abolitionist in town! Miss Amelia told me that the day her brother announced his engagement was a Sunday on which his mother had just decided it was wrong to operate cotton mills and make a livelihood off a product 'drenched with the blood of slaves.' A visiting preacher had worked her up to this fine frenzy where she wanted to close the Fergus mills and throw several hundred operatives out of employment in the dead of winter; and when Robert wouldn't work up with her, and

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she upbraided him, the dreadful truth he'd lacked courage to tell before, came out."

"That must have been a scene!"

"No; Miss Amelia says it wasn't. You know your old contention, that the drama in real life isn't dramatic, except in significance; but that on the stage people have to act to make manifest what they're feeling. Mrs. Fergus, it seems, never said a word, but walked from the room in that awful silence which hurts so, because your anger and pleading and reason alike fall on unheeding ears. When people pride themselves on silence they make such a fetich of it, that they'd rather be grilled over a slow fire than allow rhyme or reason to break down their implacableness."

Phineas shot a keen look at his daughter. She had grown very impassioned, for a mere recital of neighborhood history, and he thought he knew, now, more than he had been able to guess this afternoon, of how things fared with her in the even tenor of her life at Millville.

"Well, what happened next?" he prompted, and Mrs. Allston's eyes lost their far-seeing look as she resumed the thread of her story.

"It was a hard winter for them all, as you may suppose. Mrs. Fergus never once referred to the approaching marriage, her daughter says, but she never lost an opportunity to express her hatred of the South and all it contained and stood for. But

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when it came to a question of closing the mills, Amelia sided with her brother against the proposition, and as the three were equal owners, a majority ruled. But the lust for martyrdom was strong in the old lady, and her third of the mills' earnings remained untouched, until after the war.

"In the spring, Robert Fergus went down to Briarwood Plantation and got his bride. They had to be married very quietly, because there was no more friendliness for Massachusetts in Mississippi than t'other way 'round.

"It seems as if the Fates must have conspired to make things as hard as possible for everybody, for when little Cecile begged to take her mammy, her black Zilianne, and Alec McClintock gave the old woman her freedom papers, Robert Fergus didn't have the heart to say No, and Millville was treated to a grand sensation when the Fergus bride came home, accompanied by her 'slave.' There was so much commotion about it, that a curious thing happened: old Jane Fergus took up the cudgels in defence of her daughter-in-law!"

"Oh, lovely!"

"I knew that would interest you."

"Interest me? It tickles me to death. There's nothing more certain in human nature than the appeal of the under dog. If Millville had pitied that child Cecile, her mother-in-law would have hated her. But the confounded village took the

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one way to make that unrelenting old woman soften to the poor child. Why will people never learn that persecution is the most foolish practice in the world, that it makes the victims stubborn and makes their cause seem more just when seen through pity? If I hated a man, I should try to make him successful; I'd never seek to do him injury. Load him with gifts, and the world will hate him. Harm him while he's down, and the world will hate you."

"Well, early in January, you know, Mississippi voted for secession. That was pretty terrible, in Millville. Then, ten days later, her senators withdrew from the United States Senate, and within a month Jeff Davis, a neighbor and friend of the McClintocks, was elected President of the rebel Confederacy. Soon after that happened, little Cecile Fergus was hissed on the streets of Millville. It was only children, voicing the table-talk of their elders, who yelled 'Secesh!' after her and threatened her with snowballs they never threw. But it was as terrifying to her as if it had been the whole populace of Massachusetts, backed by artillery.

"After that, she wouldn't venture out of the house again, but sat in her room, weeping piteously and begging to be taken home. But she was far too frail to stand the journey. Robert tried to get her father to come to her, but he couldn't; he was

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deeply concerned in the affairs of his state, and the annual high water was menacing his plantation.

"Miss Amelia says it was wonderful to see her mother in those days—unbending as ever, and not able in her withered age to learn any of the sweet graces of loving—standing over that poor child, trying to keep unhappiness at bay."

At this point in her recital, Frances Allston could not forbear a tender smile at her father's enthusiasm; she knew what spot she had touched in his great range of interests. If there was one thing that, more than all others, kindled the fires in his blue eyes and brought the glow to his face, it was any shred of commentary on his kind that contradicted all the ordinary evidence about a character and showed the outcropping gentleness of the harsh or heroism of the weak or heart-hunger of the churlish. He nodded comprehension when she told him about Jane Fergus's grim surrender.

"She used to tell Cecile she mustn't cry so. 'You'll mark your baby with tears,' she used to say. And Cecile was terrified by the mystery and responsibility, but she kept on crying.

"The baby came on the last day of March, and when the only thought of the distraught household was that Cecile was slipping away from them, she startled them by shaking herself free for an instant from the haze of pain and weakness, and calling, 'Is my baby safe?' They showed her her

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baby and she seemed satisfied and drifted off again. But it seems that even in her dreams she must have apprehended awful things, for whenever she saw the baby she would seem so anxious about it, and usually cry. Then, one day, when Zilianne was holding it for her to look at, and she murmured 'Poor li'l baby,' so piteously, the old mammy swore it was the finest baby she'd ever seen and caught it up and nodded and laughed to it and babbled till its wee face dimpled into a smile, or what looked like one. 'Oh, see!' cried the little mother, 'she's a happy baby! See her smile! Felicité! Felicité!'

"She was so much comforted by that smile that she rallied a good deal, but that very day came the news that Sumter was fired on, and try as they might to keep it from her, she heard of it, and the excitement drove her wild again.

"The Sixth Massachusetts, mustered at Lowell only a few miles away, was mobbed in Baltimore five days later, and that set this community wild. It mustered a company for a local regiment, and in the spring evenings the recruits marched to the sound of the fife and drum, past here on their way to the common. Every sound drove Cecile to frenzy. She was tormented with visions of her father and Robert shooting each other to pieces.

"But by and by she seemed not to notice the marching feet any more, and her tongue babbled

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of Briarwood Plantation. 'Take me home, Robert!' she'd cry. 'Take me home!' It was the last thing she said, and two days after she died he took her home, in the face of incredible difficulties. Alec McClintock was in command of a regiment, but he got leave to be at Briarwood long enough to see his little girl laid beside her mother in the plantation burial plot. And then, when he was leaving to go back to the defence of his confederacy, Robert Fergus grasped his hand and said, 'We separate, Alec McClintock, to opposite sides of a terrible struggle. I can't take up arms against my country, but neither can I take up arms against you and the country where Cecile lies.' He came home and joined the Sanitary Commission, and when the cotton business became paralyzed by the war, he went into active service in the hospital camps, and died in the fever swamps across from Vicksburg a few days after the surrender—nominally of fever, but more really of a broken heart. Three years later Alec McClintock took his unconfined body from the trench where it lay and buried it beside Cecile's at Briarwood. McClintock and Amelia Fergus were left co-guardians of the child."

"And the child of all that sorrow is called Felicity?"

"It was the only thing her poor little mother had ever called her, and when the time for her baptism came her father would hear of no other name



Felicity

for her. He compromised with his mother on the 'ty' spelling, but that was all. How she's to be Felicity, though, in that grim household, is more than I can see, although she seems to be a born sunbeam. There! didn't I tell you there was a story back of her? "

"Yes," said Phineas, wiping his eyes, quite frankly unashamed of his tears, "and if I know anything of this world's probabilities, there's a story ahead of her, too. Nature doesn't go to those extraordinary pains to produce ordinary types."



CHAPTER III

TWO DECIDE FOR CELEBRITY

PROBABLY only one thing could have kept Phineas Morton in Millville all summer, but that thing happened: he fell ill before he had been with his daughter a week, and after a sharp attack of gastric fever was convalescent for interminable days which were chiefly beguiled by Felicity. The child was completely fascinated by him, and he found her the winsomest thing he had ever known.

Hour after hour, day after day, the old man and the little girl sat together and held converse about things he knew and things she knew and things that never were on land or sea. Sometimes the boys, his grandsons, stayed with them for a while, but the pressure of their vacation play was great and their interests were more active than Felicity's. As for her, nothing was of sufficient charm to take her away from this wondrous being who dreamed her dreams and yet other dreams which he taught her; who knew equally well about the hobgoblins and Queen Mary, and who understood perfectly when you told him how



Felicity

hard it was to keep from laughing in church because the precentor looked so much like the Cheshire Cat in that entrancing "Alice in Wonderland," on which Phineas had promptly pounced for his own delectation and which he had delightedly shared with this little friend. Gran'ma didn't think the precentor looked the least like any kind of a cat, and if he did, that was a misfortune not to be laughed at at any time, least of all in God's house. Even Aunt Amelia failed to see the resemblance, though she had seen the book, and, questioned as to whether God thought it wrong to laugh "if you couldn't hardly help it," said she didn't know, but if Gran'ma thought so, that was enough.

But Phineas, when Felicity pointed out to him the precentor passing the house, saw the likeness instantly, roared with hearty laughter at Felicity's representation of how funny he looked when he sang, and opined with convincing assurance that God liked people, especially little people, to laugh whenever they could.

This heresy, repeated at home, precipitated a tremendous crisis; such crises, it seems, are nearly always precipitated by some ludicrous happening.

At supper in the Fergus home Felicity listened for the twentieth time to her grandmother's displeased comment on where she had spent her afternoon.

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"I tell you, that play-actor's no fit company for a child," she reiterated, when Felicity had obediently given account of herself since dinner.

"I can't see that he's doing her a bit of harm," Amelia retorted, as always. Though she was Felicity's guardian, she felt obliged to justify herself to her mother.

"You'll not see it till it's too late to mend," said Jane Fergus, severely. And Felicity wondered till she was weary what irreparable harm could come to her through Mr. Morton, and why Gran'ma could not be made to feel as she felt his fascinations.

She was coming early through her first experience of that universal distress in which we battle with the prejudice of our powers that be against our dearest enchantment. No one of us, presumably, grows to maturity without suffering some degree of the resentment that comes when ruthless hands try to break the bonds of our willing thrall-dom and set us free when we are wishful only to stay bound.

Meditating on the strange perversity of Gran'ma and wishing delicacy did not forbid her asking Mr. Morton about it, she slipped from her chair, when permission was granted, and went into the kitchen, unfailing distraction for childish worries, to fill in a too brief interval before evening prayers.



Felicity

Zilianne, who had been her nurse while she needed one, was a fixture in the household and now filled the offices of cook. In the course of the supper hour she had gone into her pantry and found a mouse-trap sprung and a tiny, long-sought culprit inside.

Felicity greeted the mouse with eager interest. "Oh, what you goin' to do with him, Zilly?" she cried.

"Sho' gwine ter drown 'im, honey," said the old woman, "he bin a-eatin' mah cohn-meal; now I'se ketched 'im I'se gwine mek 'im sofry fer 'is sins."

"He's sorry now," pleaded Felicity, promptly.

"Not so sorry as he'm gwine ter be," promised Zilianne, grimly.

Felicity began to cry. "Please don't, Zilly—please don't drown him! Give him to me an' I'll carry him mi-iles away, where he can't ever get back any more."

"How kin I gi' 'im ter you? You ain't think I'se gwine ter let you traipse off wid mah onlies' mice-trap, is you? I sho' wouldn' nevah see hit agin."

"Give him to me in a little box, then. Wait——"

She was upstairs and down again in a twinkling, bringing with her a small pasteboard box hastily emptied of some doll-rag hoardings.

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"Put him in here, please, and I'll carry him a-way off," she urged.

So Zilianne put the box down close to the trap and lifted the wire door, then clapped the box cover on and handed over the reprieved, with many cautions.

"First I must poke holes in his housey, so he can breathe," said Felicity, kindling with the fine emotion of the savior and the more primitive thrill of handling danger. "And then I must put him in some supper, so he won't starve."

"Ain't gwine ter starve ter-night," grunted Zilianne, "he des' bustin' full o' yo' Gran'ma's cheese an' meal."

"Well, le's put him in a piece for breakfas'; maybe he won't know how to find breakfas', far away like I'm goin' to take him."

The cheese thus eloquently begged was scarcely crammed through the air holes—somewhat to the exclusion of air—when the call to prayers sounded peremptorily from the sitting-room.

Felicity meant to keep "Mr. Mouse" until the morning; it was asking too much of human nature to expect she would give him up sooner. And anyway, she was not allowed out of the yard after supper.

To prayers, therefore, went Mr. Mouse—which was no more than proper after his narrow escape from the destroyer—and in his queerly riddled

Felicity

cardboard home was stealthily deposited in the obscurest corner of the sitting-room, beyond which corner, if the truth be told, Felicity's thoughts did not once soar during Scripture reading and hymn-singing. Then Gran'ma, looking over the top of her spectacles at Felicity, asked solemnly:

"What is sin?"

Felicity started guiltily as she thought of Mr. Mouse, then answered glibly:

"Sin is any want of conformity unto or transgression of the law of God."

It was strange that Gran'ma's evening question, selected at random from "The Shorter Catechism" to keep Felicity from forgetting any of it, should have proved so disconcerting. But Felicity, who knew in a way what the big words meant, assured herself that if keeping a poor little mouse overnight was any want of conformity unto or transgression of the law of God, she'd never been told so.

She was so thinking as she knelt while Gran'ma prayed, when there was a shrill scream, the prayer came abruptly to an end, and she jumped up to find Gran'ma shaking her voluminous, crinolined skirts excitedly and crying, "Scat! Scat!"

For a moment Felicity was scared; her Gran'ma's panic was so very real. But when Mr. Mouse had been shaken down and had made good his escape, she burst into gleeful laughter and

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laughed until she cried—at which Gran'ma was sufficiently recovered to be indignant.

"What do you mean?" she asked the culprit, sternly.

"Please, Gran'ma, it was so funny!"

"Everything is funny to you, it seems. That's what comes of association with a buffoon."

"What's that?"

"A buffoon is a person who sees nothing but fun in the misfortunes of others."

"I didn't know it was a misfortune, Gran'ma. I was just thinking Mr. Mouse must be—be so surprised. He must 'a' thought he was in the bigges' trap in the world!"

"Did you turn him loose in here?"

"No'm; I was keepin' him tight, an' he must 'a' got out."

"He very certainly did," grimly. "But what I find most fault with is, not the fright you gave me, but your disrespectful enjoyment of my distress. If I had behaved so at your age, I should have been punished terribly."

"Couldn't you ever laugh?"

"I never laughed at my elders—that's sure."

"Mr. Morton says God likes folks to laugh whenever they can."

"And what, if you'll tell me, does Mr. Morton know about God?"

"Oh, a lot! He told me."

Felicity

"I don't doubt! He'll make an atheist of you before he's through. I can see now that you discount your church and home teachings by what he says, and I'll have no more of it—this traffick-ing with evil-doers. You'll keep away from that man in the future—mark my words! Amelia may let you go to the devil, but I'll not stand by and be a party to it. I'm your keeper before God, whether your father made me such or not. You're my son's child, and I'll save your soul for you if I can."

Felicity began to cry and Amelia told her to go upstairs. Then followed a stormy session about Felicity's associations.

"I told you all this would come of letting her act in plays and spend her time with mummers," said Jane Fergus.

"And I say that's all antediluvian bigotry," retorted Amelia, "and that it's a great privilege for Felicity to have the companionship of a man like Mr. Morton."

"It's a privilege she'll have to forego, then," said Jane, "as long as she's under my roof."

Encouraged by her rebellion much as a child is encouraged when he omits his prayers and meets no cataclysmic consequences, Amelia retreated in good order, her cheeks flushed and her mouth as determinedly set as her mother's. She made no reply to her mother's ultimatum; she wanted the

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night to think it over. But she was not cowed, and she knew it.

Upstairs, Felicity was waiting to be "unbuttoned in the back" and to have her silken-fine, fair hair done up in rag curlers—hideously uncomfortable to sleep in, but considered indispensable by Amelia, who hoped thus to correct a deficiency which gave her sore concern.

When the bedtime preparations were completed and the little, night-gowned figure was outstretched in the small bed beside Amelia's own, the woman who was finding vent thus belatedly for her maternal passion, on a child not her own, sat down in the dark by the wide-open window, to look out into the summer night—and to make the great decision of her life.

Amelia Fergus was fifty-one. Youth was long gone; middle age—middle age for a spinster in those days—was nearly gone; there remained only the long, slow end. Life, in so far as it held that expectancy which makes life worth living, was over for her. For herself she could entertain no more eagerness, dream no more dreams—could anticipate only release. And that, before she had lived at all! No, no! It must not be! God never mocked one so. He had given her this child, this wonderful child, to live in; they would realize together, she and Felicity—

It was midnight when she crept to bed to finish



Felicity

a restless night. An hour or so later Felicity sat up in her little bed crying out, sleepily:

“Aunt Elie! One’s out!”

And Amelia reached over and re-wound the undone curl. Felicity knew by bitter experience how unbecoming was the effect of a head with many bobbing ringlets and one long, straight wisp, and oftener than not she woke at night and cried out to fend off such a mishap.

Toward morning Amelia fell into an exhausted, dreamful sleep from which she did not wake when the rising bell rang, nor until Felicity went to her and shook her gently by the shoulders. To be late to meals in Jane Fergus’s house was a cardinal offence even the child had a dread of committing.

Recalled to that pitiless knowledge of her situation which she had mercifully forgotten for a while in sleep, Amelia sat up, conscious of keen regret that it was day so soon.

Felicity backed up to have her little petticoats buttoned and Amelia, when she had done this, took the child by the shoulders and wheeled her round, facing her; looking deep into the brown eyes as if searching for an answer in their velvety depths, she asked:

“Felicity, would you like to be an actress?”

“How could I? I’m so little.”

“They have little girls, sometimes. Mr. Mor-

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ton has little girls in his plays. I think maybe if we ask him he'll take you to play with him right now, and then when you're grown up you might be celebrated like he is."

"Is he celerbated?"

"Yes, very."

"What is celerbated?"

"Celebrated! It's being famous, well known—having ever and ever so many people like you, and when you play they go to see you and applaud, and you make lots of money and travel all over the world, and everywhere you go people know about you and try to do lovely things for you, and you meet other celebrated people—kings and queens, sometimes—and great writers and painters and musicians; and everybody envies you and wishes they were in your place, instead of feeling sorry for you because you've never called your soul your own."

Amelia was quite breathless when she finished her description of celebrity—which often recurred to Felicity years afterwards.

"I'd like that," said Felicity. Then, lapsing into a quaint Scotch idiom of her grandmother's, she repeated, "I'd like it fine!"

Amelia laughed.

"Does Mr. Morton know kings and queens?" Felicity asked, after a moment.

"I don't know, but some actors do. They play

Felicity

before kings and queens and the kings and queens give them elegant presents."

"I'd like that," said Felicity, jumping up and down in glee; "what kind o' presents?"

"Oh, jewels, mostly, I believe—diamonds and things like that."

Felicity knew about diamonds, because sometimes Amelia unlocked a drawer and took out Cecile's little trinkets that were to be Felicity's some day.

They were still talking of the glittering emoluments of celebrity when Felicity shrugged her wee shoulders, made scared, solemn eyes, and clapped both hands to her mouth.

"What's the matter?" questioned Amelia, looking furtively behind her; but no one was there.

"Gran'ma!" said Felicity, in a half-wicked, half-frightened way. She looked at Amelia and bit her lip. "Gran'ma wouldn't let us."

"No," agreed Amelia, soberly, "she wouldn't. But would you do it anyway? I mean, would you want to? If Gran'ma wouldn't let you, but I would, would you go?"

"What would Gran'ma do?"

"I don't know," bitterly, "turn us out, I suppose—certainly refuse to speak to us for a long, long time."

"I wouldn't like that."

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"Neither would I, but if you want to do great things you have to do hard things first. I've read about a lot of people who did, and they always had to make a hard beginning; there was always somebody who didn't want them to do the thing that they were born to do."

"Would Gran'ma be mad for keeps?"

"I don't know; she might, I can't tell."

"Wouldn't it be wicked to make her that mad?"

If Amelia had needed anything to establish her in her revolt she could have had nothing better than this. Old wounds broke out afresh within her, and the pain of them drove her wild.

"Listen to me," she commanded the wondering child. They had been dressing as they talked, but now they were done.

"If you always ask yourself what your Gran'ma will think, every time you want to do anything, you'll never get anything done—do you hear? you'll never get anything done! That's what I did, and there was never a thing I wanted to do that I didn't give it up because she'd be mad if I did it. Now, you sha'n't begin that way. Do you understand? You sha'n't do it."

"Yes'm," said Felicity, thoroughly awed by her aunt's vehemence.

"Well, then, give me your hand and come to breakfast; there's the bell." And hand in hand the



Felicity

rebels descended the stairs and entered the dining-room.

Amelia was no tactician. It was not in her to sit at meat with her mother in all apparent filialness while harboring the determination to revolt. Last night, when the thing was a temptation merely, and she had not succumbed, it was different. In Amelia's simple code she was entitled to silence until she had decided, and then she was constrained to a declaration.

Jane Fergus was sitting at a window in the dining-room, reading her morning paper.

"Good-morning," she said, without looking up. Jane was never the first to bridge an unpleasantness.

Amelia, still holding Felicity by the hand, stood before her mother, a mixture of fear and defiance in her attitude.

"Mother," she said, "I have something very—very important to tell you."

Jane Fergus laid down her paper. There was a curious ring in Amelia's voice that somehow brought instantly to mind the night when Robert had announced his approaching marriage.

"Well?" she said; and waited.

It was desperately hard to begin, but Amelia had done with faltering.

"I'm sorry you feel the way you do about Mr. Morton, but he thinks Felicity has a talent

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for acting; he says its development should begin now. I know you won't approve, but I can't help it; I'm going to see if he will take her on the stage—I think he will. If he does it will be a wonderful chance for her. I—she wants to go and I—I think we ought not to stand in her way."

Jane Fergus ignored her daughter and fixed her searching gaze on Felicity.

"Is this true? Are you wanting to go?"

Felicity looked from the compressed mouth and keen eyes before her, to the compressed mouth and unflinching eyes above her. She wanted to cry, to fling her arms about her Gran'ma's neck and say she would never be an actress—never! But something in Amelia's face restrained her and she choked down the lump in her throat and answered:

"Yes'm."

"This is your doing," said Jane Fergus, turning to Amelia. "To satisfy your own wicked ambition you traffic this child's soul to the devil. I wash my hands of you. Her blood be upon your head!"

With this terrible pronouncement she took off her spectacles, folded them into their case, and left the room.

There was no breakfast eaten in the Fergus household that morning.

CHAPTER IV

THE NEW LIFE BEGINS—WITHOUT "STRUTTING"

IT was an odd little deputation that presented itself at Mrs. Allston's about ten o'clock and asked for Mr. Morton. Felicity usually came blithely on her visits to her friend, but this morning she reflected Amelia's almost terrible seriousness and partook in some measure of her fright, so that Phineas at once scented something unusual.

Without more strategy in leading up to her business than she had used a little earlier in breaking with her mother, Amelia plunged immediately into the middle of things.

"Mr. Morton," she began, abruptly, almost as soon as they had said good-morning, "will you take Felicity and make an actress of her?"

Phineas was staggered for a moment. Since learning Felicity's history and something of the characteristics of the household dominated by Jane Fergus, he had abandoned all thought of Felicity as a possible recruit to the stage, in her childhood at least. She might revolt when she was grown, he thought, and the dull fret of Federal Street had worn on her vivid nature past endurance; but

The New Life

that she would be sharer in Amelia's long-overdue assertion of her rights, he had never reckoned on. The companionship of the fanciful little creature had been very welcome to him in his convalescence, but hardly since the day of the show in the barn had he thought of her as a child of the road he loved; always he seemed to see her chained to Federal Street, and restless, fluttering.

He knew—such things always leak out, and the more quickly and surely when a child knows them—that Mrs. Fergus had discountenanced, all along, Felicity's association with him, even with his grandsons, and her participation in the plays in the barn; and that Amelia had set her authority against her mother's wishes and overruled. But that the middle-aged woman, growing old in subjection, would ever take such a step as this was so far from likelihood that he had never for a moment contemplated it.

So, when Amelia asked him if he would take Felicity and make an actress of her, Phineas hesitated.

"Are you sure you want her to be one?" he asked.

"You said you thought she could," Amelia answered, "and I'm sure I want her to have a chance to be what she can; it's what I never had, and I mean that she shall be allowed to do better with her life than I have done with mine."



Felicity

" But—pardon me, dear lady—you know so little about the life of the theatre and what it entails. I love the life, and am glad every day that I have lived no other. But I kept my daughter from it because I loved her so—with what wisdom I am not yet able to say—and I shouldn't encourage one of her children to go on the stage unless his bent for it was so strong we couldn't keep him off. Now, I couldn't even enter into a discussion of the stage for Felicity, here, without warning you that it's a hard life, a perilous life, and a life that'll be terribly strange to you and to her. If you were to take her and go to be a missionary to the cannibals, you would hardly find yourselves in stranger surroundings than you'll meet with in stageland. And you may stake everything on this cast of the die and find after all that she lacks some quality essential in an actress. It's a big step, dear lady."

" I know; but I want her to take a big step of some sort before her will gets so paralyzed she can't. If I let her wait until she's grown, she'll have learned the habit of submission then—and if the old dominance is gone, she'll find a new one to bow to. I don't care if she does have to fight! Fighting's better than brooding and regretting—anything's better than lifelong regretting! "

" But she might regret the very life you're taking her from! How would you bear her reproaches then? "

The New Life

"She can go back to the old life if she wants to; but if she stays there she'll never get out."

"The chances of her getting out are far, far better than the chances of her getting back, dear lady. There's not much going back in this vagabond life of ours. We think, sometimes, we'd like to, but we soon unlearn all the home-biding ways, and it's precious hard to learn them again."

"But whether one goes or stays, one must take chances of regret," insisted Amelia.

"Yes."

"Then, if you please, I'll venture on Felicity's behalf."

"Good! I felt it was only square to warn you, but I like your pluck. If it hadn't been for determination like yours the stage would have been a pretty poor institution, for I don't suppose any one ever went on it with the consent of his family—not even if they were actors themselves. I ran away, myself, to be an actor, and was called a fool and a disgrace to my family."

"Oh, did you?"

Phineas smiled tenderly at Amelia's eagerness. "There's nothing in the world," he used to say, "like being able to say to the other fellow, 'I've been through this same hard row you're travelling, and I give you my word for it, it gets easier as you get farther along.' It's worth all it costs, to be able to say that, sometimes."

Felicity

"Yes," he said, reminiscently, "I ran away, when I was twenty, and got to London, somehow—my folks lived in Surrey, and I was bound out there to a bookseller. But some strolling players, with a taste for certain high-flavored old books, used to frequent our place, and I heard them talk, and saw them act, and learned from them something of actors' haunts and ways—and one fine morning there was an apprentice missing from his work and a silly coot missing from his good, quiet home, and a fair distance toward London on the king's highway was a lad trudging along what he called the Road to Fame. Ah, well! it turned out to be that, or something like it, but I had no reason to expect that it would. There was everything against me—everything but a mouth as wide as my face, almost, and an agile pair of heels.

"I went, in London, to that Light Horse tavern, in Orange Court, which was known as the House of Call for Actors, and there fell in with a merry lot of jesters who belonged to the stage and mocked the pretensions of aspirants. That was a great place, and a great company. It was there I used to see Charles Lamb and some of his cronies, come to enjoy the hilarious fun. And it was there that a strolling player induced me to pay all I had in the world—five pounds—for the privilege of playing Horatio (fancy me Horatio!) in a benefit performance he was getting up. The benefit was an-

The New Life

nounced for the Widow of an Officer, but if there was any such who benefited by it, she must have been a prospective bride of my stroller, and that was a doubtful benefit for any woman. He sold off the parts to stage-struck hangers-on of the Light Horse—all but Hamlet, which he played himself—and we actually appeared at the Haymarket. But no manager, seeing my Horatio, was struck with my genius; I had paid all my capital for my little hour upon the stage, and that seemed likely to be the last as well as the first, until my light heels got me some fame among the tavern folk, and I discovered a grotesque value in my mouth. It would take a week, dear lady, to tell you all the things that befell me after that—of my coming to America, my years with the Black Face boys—God bless 'em!—and all the rest. Forty-five years, almost, I've trod the boards, and if there's any vicissitude possible to a vagabond player that I haven't known, I've never heard of it. But there isn't a day of it I regret—there isn't any man on earth I'd change experiences with.

“Now, the ordinary thing for you to do with Felicity would be to take her to Boston or New York, and try to get the managers of resident companies to give her a chance when they put on a play that has a child part. That would give you a quiet life, not necessarily very different from what you know now. But there's no dearth of

Felicity

actors' children available for that sort of thing, and you'd have a dickens of a time getting a chance at it. It just happens that I am one of the few, the very few, men who carry a company—that is, instead of travelling with only my stage manager and playing with stock companies here and there, I take all my own players with me. My plays never call for a large cast, and I can do this, though it's a lot of an undertaking and meets with a good deal of prejudice. Jefferson does it, and I do it, and there are two or three others who do it; everybody else adheres to the old system, which is more comfortable, perhaps, for the support, but more precarious for the star. Now, I'll tell you: my company begins rehearsals in Boston the last Monday in this month, and we open in Providence on the 16th of September. You get Felicity ready and I'll take her along; I always have a child's part in my plays, and I'll take personal interest in seeing what I can do to break her in."

Amelia looked the thanks she could not speak.

"What is 'ready'?" she asked.

"Oh, two or three little childish white dresses for the stage, so she'll always have one clean; and whatever you want her to have for fall and winter wear off the stage. You'd better stock her up pretty well, for she'll have to travel in the care of the wardrobe woman, who is too busy to have much time for her."

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Phineas made this shot after having taken careful aim, and he was gratified by unmistakable evidence that it had gone straight to the mark. Amelia's face instantly was the picture of despair.

"Where," she faltered, piteously, "where am I to be?"

Phineas feigned surprise. "Why, I really hadn't thought," he said, "but Felicity's part will be small and her pay will not be nearly enough to cover your expenses on the road. The wardrobe woman in my company has not much to do, and she is always hired with the understanding that she's to have charge of any child or children in the organization. It's a job, carrying children, but I've had too many catastrophes trying strange ones."

Amelia seemed to be turning something of tremendous importance over in her mind.

"What else," she asked with ill-concealed purpose, "does the wardrobe woman do?"

"Sews, mostly; keeps the stage costumes in order and sees that they are properly put on in the case of the minor players."

Narrowly, from under half-closed lids which seemed quite unobserving, Phineas watched the emotions working in her face.

"Could I—couldn't I be the wardrobe woman?" she begged eagerly. Then, as if to fend off the denial she feared, "I couldn't let Felicity go out of my care. I want her to have her

Felicity

chance, but I should die without her—if I couldn't care for her. I didn't know how you managed things, but I never dreamed of letting her go without me."

There was a quaver in her voice now, and Phineas had no armor against tears. Although he was only a dozen years Amelia's senior, he had seen so much more than she, lived so much more variously, that he felt like her grandsire, and there was a grandfatherly benevolence in his touch and in his tone as he laid his hand on her shoulder and said:

"Well, well! we'll see, dear lady, we'll see! I'll have to communicate with my business manager and see if he has a wardrobe woman engaged. But we'll be about this part of the world for some weeks, so don't you worry yet about giving up your little girl—eh, Felicity?"

"No, sir," said Felicity, awed beyond the power of thinking speech but answering mechanically as she thought she was expected to.

"We have a little money, Felicity and I," Amelia explained, "but it's not much, and I don't know if any of it could be made available just now. Grandfather McClintock, in Mississippi, is as poor as a church mouse, after the war, and our mills here are not worth what they were once. Felicity owns her father's share and I own mine, but the whole income last year—net income, I mean—

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was only about three thousand dollars. We ought to sell and let the mills have active, man's management, but mother can't bear to think of the Fergus mills operated by strangers. I can work, though! I can sew—I can do anything but part from Felicity!"

Then Felicity, still clinging, as when she came, to Amelia's hand, sobbed heart-brokenly.

"I don't want to be a *nactress* without Aunt Elie!"

"You sha'n't, dear child, you sha'n't," promised Phineas, his own eyes brimming.

"Mercy me!" he meditated, blowing his nose vigorously after Amelia and Felicity had gone, "seems to me I never was present at so solemn an embarkation. I feel almost as excited as that poor woman does—more excited than I did the day I ran away to be an actor. Blame me! I was too fool-young then to know what I was doing, and it was easy to run. But this woman feels the wrench to the limit, and, by gad! it's tragic. I hope the child's worth it!"

Amelia went home in a state of mind familiar to all who have lived long enough to learn that pure exultation never comes after youth's unthink-
ingness is past. She had won her case, the heavy doors of her prison-house stood open for her at last, and the wide, wide world invited her. But already she was so desperately homesick for

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the old familiar frets, so compassionate of her mother's suffering, that she could scarcely see through her tears the outward-swinging gates.

She was in her room when she saw her mother come home at noon from the mill; Jane Fergus always spent the mornings at the mill, and this day of wrath made no exception. It was cruelly hot, this blazing August noonday, and whether from the wilting heat or from other causes, Jane's large figure seemed to droop pathetically. She was an old woman, Amelia reflected—past three score and ten—and she had suffered much. It was hard, bitterly hard, to go away and leave her all alone in the chill twilight of her life.

"It's not worth this price," she sobbed, "nothing's worth this price;" and she went downstairs to tell her mother they wouldn't go.

Jane Fergus had been to her room, off the sitting-room, and had removed her widow's bonnet and black henrietta-cloth dress (no persuasion availed to make her appear in public less formally gowned) and now wore an old black silk skirt and a loose, white dimity sacque. Her face was very red, but there was not a hair ruffled in her sleek coiffure. She looked formidable again, in her composure, and Amelia's courage, born of tenderness, oozed rapidly. But she lost no time.

"Mother," she began abruptly, "I—we are not going—we've decided not to go."

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"Why not?" The question was sharp, passionless, judicial. Amelia wavered.

"Why, we—I—I don't think we ought to, if you disapprove so much."

"You never were imagining for one moment I'd approve?"

"No, mother."

"Then how do you find, so sudden, my disapproving hinders you?"

Amelia was silent, and her mother, scenting a conciliation that was not defeat, said sharply:

"Don't try to deceive me! I'd as lief you went now as when my poor old bones are rotting."

It was such a bald statement of the very reasoning wherewith Amelia had salved the smarting of delay that she started, guiltily.

"D'ye think," her mother went on, remorselessly, "that I could live in the house with you the remaining years of my life, knowing that the minute my tongue is still ye'll be away to your fleshpots? Go your ways! Ye've nursed rebellion against me these many years—d'ye think I've not known it?—now you can go—and no coming back, mind! You make your bed, and you can lie in it."

Phineas was one of the earliest of the comedians to depart from the old standard comedies in which there were, properly, no star parts, and act in plays

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specially written for the exploitation of such a modern spirit as he exemplified. He had been a faithful student of the French method and delighted in perfect ensemble playing so much that he was one of the first to indulge in the expense of a travelling support, but he contended that in the most perfect picture an artist always concentrates attention on some one point, always focuses on a central figure, always intends that some part shall dominate, and the others, however perfectly done, shall subordinate. And so, believing in himself as a superior artist, and knowing himself to be a personality the public liked to applaud, he chose his plays and his players, as he said, "to suit his complexion."

Another of his theories about that art of the drama to which he had given his life was that a majority of actors are spoiled by a too-great consciousness of their audiences and too-little absorption in their parts and in the play. He never went so far as to contend that a player should forget himself in his part; he knew the dangers of that, both for the individual player and for the ensemble work of the whole cast. But he hated alike playing to the boxes and playing to the gallery, and believed that the more account an actor took of his audience the worse he played.

"Of course you've got to remember there's an audience there," he was wont to say, "and direct

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your voice so it'll reach 'em, and omit, whenever possible, to turn your back on 'em, and otherwise keep in mind that you're a paid entertainer, and not soliloquizing. But more people go on the stage because they want to preen and prance for people in the seats than go on because they believe they've got a mimetic gift, and that's how we get so much silly attitudinizing. We all know how abominably a child acts when it becomes conscious of being watched, and most actors behave worse. It's the essence of good dramatic training to learn how to be conscious but never to seem so."

For years he had wrestled, now more, now less vainly, with people he played with, to bring them to his way of thinking. Now, in his ripe age, when he inclined to exact less and less of human nature and to allow more and more for its essential weaknesses, he believed it was asking too much to ask any but a born mime to step across the footlights and not strut for those left behind. He had worn himself weary in this asking; now he had a new plan to interest him.

Felicity had never seen a play and had no notion of the theatre, nor of acting for applause; the joy of the pretence was all that animated her. He was delighted with the prospect of experimenting with her and revolved in his mind an infinite number of pleasant schemes.

Accordingly, when she and Amelia had estab-

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lished themselves in their Boston boarding-house, he called one day, before rehearsals had begun, and took Felicity for a walk in the Common and the Public Gardens.

Up and down the broad shaded avenues of the good old Common they walked, hand clasped in hand, Felicity skipping a little now and then as with an occasional bubbling over of the pot of joy, as he told her story after story about events these places recalled. Everything was a story to Phineas, and, Englishman though he was, he had a great enthusiasm for many of the things the Common calls to mind. After they had walked until they were tired, they sat down on a bench and fed the squirrels and petted some puppies a man had for sale. Then Felicity begged:

“Tell me another story, please.”

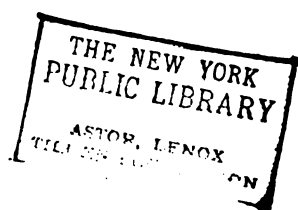
And he began, in the most entrancing fashion ever devised, “Once upon a time”—and told her, without intimating what it was, the story of his new play, in which there was “a nice, nice, nice old man, just like me, and a dear, dearer, dearest little girl, just like you.”

It was a beautiful story, and when Phineas asked how she would like to play she was that little girl, she nodded delightedly at him and said she would.

“Well, when the little girl, Amy, hears the strange man ask her Grandpa, ‘Was there a child?’ she runs in and throws her arms about her



Thus he rehearsed Felicity in her first part.



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Grandpa's neck and cries, ' Here I am, Grandpa ! ' and Grandpa says, ' Here you are, dear little girl ! ' and holds you like this, while he talks to the man and strokes your curls——"

" Mine are not really curly," interrupted Felicity, with painful honesty, " only rag curls what Aunt Elie makes."

Phineas smiled. " Well, lots of things on the stage aren't any realer. And, as I was saying, while Grandpa strokes your curls you don't say a word. Then he gets into an argument——"

" What's that? "

" Oh, I forgot you've never had any at your house—that it was no use," he answered, chuckling.

" No, sir," said Felicity, gravely, not in the least knowing what an argument was or how one got in it or what one did while in, " it wouldn't have been any use to us; we "—with sudden inspiration—" we didn't keep any horse."

Phineas laughed so loudly at this as to attract the attention of some passers-by, and here and there among them one nudged another and whispered. But Phineas Morton was used to that.

Thus he rehearsed Felicity in her first part—now in the August sunshine on the Boston Common, now in the boarding-house parlor. Finally, when the company was well under way with its rehearsals, she went several times to the theatre and learned her entrances and exits and got

Felicity

acquainted with her fellow-players. There was so much to see, so much to wonder at, on the occasions of these visits to the big stage, that her thoughts never once strayed across the cold footlights to the interminable rows of shrouded chairs which would hold their thousands and hundreds of thousands come to see her, ere her day on the stage was done.

The stage manager was more than dubious about this experiment of The Old Man, as they all called him.

"Ten to one, when she sees the audience she'll walk right on over the footlights," he said, "or turn and flee for the wings."

But The Old Man was willing to risk it, and events proved him justified. In Providence, on the first night, Felicity stood in the wings holding tight to Amelia's hand until she heard her cue, then ran on crying her little lines as gayly as if only Phineas were on the stage.

The applause with which an audience invariably greets a child performer startled her for an instant, but Morton caught her as he had so often done in their play-times and swung her high above his head in gleeful greeting, so that she forgot the strange sound of hands clapping and laughed in genuine childish delight to be tossed so high.

Felicity's début was accomplished, her new life was begun.

CHAPTER V

THE NEW LIFE GROWS TIRESOME, WITHOUT
"STRUTTING"

"I SEE," said Frances Allston, reading from the *Lowell Citizen*, "that 'Phineas Morton opened his annual tour in Providence last night, playing, as always, to a packed and enthusiastic house. The star was in fine form, and his new play, *The Return*, is admirably adapted to the exploitation of those charming talents which have made Mr. Morton one of the best loved men on the American stage.' Now, is there another actor in the world, do you suppose, who is so unfailingly spoken of in terms of affection as father? I think he ought to be the proudest and happiest man alive."

"You've heard him say, often enough, how far from filling fame is." Herbert Allston would not have been human had he felt no envy of the admiration Frances lavished on her father. Himself a quiet, substantial business man about whose charms or whose achievements no one could ever have expatiated, he had moments of bitter resentment that so much fuss should be made about

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attractiveness and geniality and so little about integrity and diligence. He knew himself for a man infinitely more reliable than his father-in-law, and innocent of a score of big and little failings which marked that "prince of vagabonds"; but the world, it seemed, and Frances in particular, took small account of what you resisted and exaggerated account of the pleasure you gave it. It was all very well for people who didn't know any better about the obverse side of celebrity, but Frances ought to have a better opinion of stability. If she hadn't—well, a woman shouldn't marry a man unless she admired and desired his particular gifts above those of any one else!

But Frances, who followed with intense interest every step in her father's career and lavished on him an adoring love few women can feel for two men, was quite oblivious to the wistfulness of that plain man, her husband.

"Fame," she retorted, cheerily enough, "may not be very filling to those that earn it, but it's a heap of satisfaction to those that love them. I dare say father's fame is more joy to me than it is to him, and I'm sure mother was always prouder of him than any human being could be of himself. Father always says no one can be proud of himself, because those who do things are so painfully conscious of the distance between what they have done and what they tried to do."

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"Does it say anything about Felicity?" asked Morton, indicating the paper.

His mother laughed. "Strangely enough, not a word." Then, "I hope Jane Fergus sees this," she said, resentfully remembering how Jane had considered Phineas unfit for Felicity's companionship.

Over in the Fergus house was a strange situation: Jane Fergus was there alone with black Zilianne, whose heart had broken with hers at the departure of the twain seeking opportunity. Every effort to excuse the rebels that poor Zilly made, Jane sternly silenced—but it was her one comfort that Zilly continued to make them.

"I hears," said Zilly, "dat mos' ob de slabes dat Abe Linkum made inter free niggers was glad ter run erway but heap gladder ter run back agin. If you-all is fotch up er slabe, hit's mighty hard ter enjy bein' er free nigger. Dey'll come back, shore nuff," she would conclude, with absolute innocence of irony.

"I don't want them back," Jane Fergus would declare, firmly.

"Yes, you does, Ole Miss, yes, you does," Zilly insisted, "you cain't fool God thataway! He done know you better'n you know yo'se'f, an' He gwine ter bring 'em back an' mek 'em eat yo' fat calf like He say."

Jane did see the *Lowell Citizen*—and put it in



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the stove. She saw, too, a Boston paper of three weeks' later date, containing a column account of the metropolitan opening and granting a line to Felicity Fergus, "who, as the child, Amy, was winsome."

That line made a profounder impression on the Allston boys than all they had ever seen in print about their grandfather. Celebrity seemed the inevitable thing for him, but when Felicity had actually got her name in the paper it made them feel that they had been very close to greatness.

The following Saturday they were taken in to Boston "to see Felicity act" as they persisted in saying. And, sitting with their mother in a stage box, they were only with difficulty restrained from calling out to Felicity, when she came running on.

After the *matinée* Grandfather gave a party, a stage tea-party he called it, and had a beautiful supper sent over from the Parker House and served on the stage—set with a country door-yard scene for the first act.

Then the boys heard how Felicity "liked to act"—which was none too well, already—and Amelia plied Frances with questions about Jane Fergus, concerning whom Mrs. Allston could only report that she seemed to be well and that it was said she never mentioned the seceders to any one in Millville.

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The boys told Felicity how they had tried to give plays without her, and failed; how, after rejecting all those plays wherein she had been the star, they had settled upon one that called for very light feminine support: "Settlers Crossing the Western Plains." This required Indians, "horses," a settler and his family, an express wagon, and a brave scout. No one, needless to say, wished to be the horses, and no one was anxious, to say the least, to be the settler. Even the scout's rôle was apportioned with some difficulty, so great was the desire to be an Indian. But, alas! these troubles were as nothing when they came to look for a girl who would trust herself and her family of dolls in Morton's express wagon while Indians attacked her and the horses pranced in fright and the brave scout, riding on a stick bronco, came galloping up to aid her husband's defence. No use to tell those timorous little Sarahs and Sophias and Harriets and Emilys who lived in the neighborhood, that "Felicity would have been it!" They were stolidly unmoved in their determination not to be "tommyhawked" and as no boy would take a matronly part, the whole thing had to be abandoned in favor of a battle piece with scouts and Indians only. It was a significant thing, by the way, that none of the battles of the past few years was ever re-fought in Millville, where, though any boy would gladly "be" a screaming, scalping

Felicity

Indian, no boy would consent for a moment to "be" a gray-clad Confederate.

Phineas was much interested in the boys' account of this dramatic endeavor, and more interested to note its effect on Felicity, who already was tired of the routine and the exactions of her new life.

She was tired of saying her same little lines over and over and doing always the same identical things and no others under penalty. She missed childish companionship and would have been glad, many a time, to go back to Federal Street and play settler's wife or cannibals *en masse* or any other rôle, in the Allston barn.

She admitted as much to Phineas, after the boys were gone.

"But just think how they envied you," ventured Phineas, craftily, "how grand they think it is to play in a real play as you do."

"Do they?" eagerly.

There was that in her manner which made Phineas smile whimsically. "Alas, for the best laid philosophies!" he said, "human nature's stronger than 'em all."

"Sir?" said Felicity, wonderingly.

"Would you like to go back to Millville to stay?" he asked, as if that were a re-wording of his unintelligible remark.

"No, sir," promptly, "not to stay—only for



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sometimes, when I'm lonesome. But I s'pose I can't if I want to be a *nactress*."

Phineas shook his head and looked at her with that kind of smile he had which made one hesitate whether to laugh or cry. "Already, poor baby," he murmured, "already!"

Felicity really had a good deal to stand. Amelia's ambition for her was inexorable and her ways, touching health, looks, and education, were rigorous.

"I don't want to be so fine!" Felicity wailed, daily, in protest. But Amelia said, "You have to be!" as if that settled it—which indeed it did. She had become a past-mistress of beauty secrets and Felicity was the object of all her experiments. Every mouthful the child ate, she watched closely and at least thrice daily would pounce on some forbidden morsel half way to Felicity's mouth on fork or spoon or in her fingers. "That'll ruin your teeth!" she'd pronounce against one; and "That'll spoil your complexion!" she'd declare against another.

She had abandoned the curling-rags and taken, instead, to making the child's hair more and more silky, since it refused to be curly. It seemed to Felicity that she spent hours, every day, having her hair brushed; that she never wanted to do anything that she was not called away to scrub valiantly at her teeth or to suffer some other species of boredom

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in the interests of her good looks. There was no keeping pace with Amelia's zeal for her and she fretted a good deal under the constraint of trying; so that poor Amelia had a heavy burden to bear, what with her soreness of heart about her mother, and her dislike of the roving life, and Felicity's resentment of the measures taken, at so great cost, in her behalf.

In December they reached New York, where they could settle down, as the engagement was to be a long one. Amelia and Felicity found a comfortable boarding place not far from Madison Square and thither, every day, the child was taken for exercise which, with her, had come to take the place of romping, childish play. Amelia bought her a "hoople" and taught her to roll it up and down the smooth walks while she sat by and kept the child in sight. But Felicity, after the novelty wore off, hated her hoople as the lonely child hates any kind of solitary sport and refused to roll it save under compulsion.

Phineas, appealed to, said she must have some childish companionship. "Try to find some little girl who will be frankly impressed with Felicity's 'acting,'" he said, "she needs the stimulus of envy, poor baby."

"I was all wrong about strutting," he confided to George Holland one day when he met that fine comedian and stepped aside with him for a soul-

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swopping. "Strut?" he went on, whimsically, "why, we all strut, on and off the boards—for our other selves, if we have no better audience. I guess it's the chance for strutting for some one that keeps most of us up and doing; there must always be somebody who seems impressed—or we fall to thinking about quietuses and bare bodkins."

As much interested in this as he had been, five months ago, in the opposite theory, Phineas began to devote himself to Felicity's need of applause. The hand-clapping of strangers across the foot-lights meant nothing to her. Neither did the kindly comment of other actor-folk she met when with him. What she needed was the wide-eyed, open-mouthed envy of another little girl, Phineas decided.

Accordingly, he took her to Madison Square one afternoon and, singling out a girl he thought the likeliest, he soon had her engaged in a race around the Square with Felicity—a hoople-chasing race, from which they returned flushed, breathless, and happy.

Then Phineas told them a story, while they rested on the bench beside him, one on either side. And he wrote a pass for the little girl and her mother so she could go, Saturday afternoon, to see Felicity act.

After that, he could leave the affair to itself—with proper cautioning of Amelia not to spoil it.

Felicity

Amelia, poor soul, was delighted to see how Felicity throve on this new happiness. But alas! the new friend had no sooner become satisfyingly familiar than she became a dissatisfying criterion.

"Ella don't have to do this!" wailed Felicity, when she was summoned from her doll play to have her hair brushed or to take a nap.

"'Doesn't,' not 'don't,'" corrected Aunt Elie.

"Ella don't have to say doesn't," pleaded Felicity.

"Ella doesn't play with Mr. Morton and have all the little girls in the theatre look at her and say how pretty her hair is and how they wish theirs was like that," said Amelia—who had been coached to good purpose.

"Do they say my hair's pretty?"

"Well, I don't know; but you want them to, don't you?"

"I don't care! I can't hear them if they do."

"No; but if you don't take care of yourself, and look as well as you can, and study all the things you're told to study, you can't be an actress. Do you want to stop trying, and go back to Millville, and grow up to be plain and old like I am, and die without having amounted to anything in the world?"

"No'm."

"Well, then, there are no two ways about it. If you want to have things that are worth while,



The New Life Grows Tiresome

you've got to work for them, and give up other things. It seems to me you're a big enough girl to understand that—aren't you?"

"Yes'm," said Felicity.

And Phineas, when this was reported to him, looked **searchingly** at Amelia, with a look she could not understand.

"I wonder when anybody gets that 'big,'" he ruminated, after she was gone.

CHAPTER VI

THE MAKING OF A COMÉDIENNE

WITH such mild misgivings as his optimistic nature was capable of, Phineas watched Amelia's anxious hovering. Several times he remonstrated, whimsically, but to no purpose. Then he resigned himself to the inevitable, knowing that a change was imminent in the near future and trusting to luck and to his persuasive powers at the moment to turn it to the child's advantage.

After two years on the stage Felicity had begun to lengthen out to that spindling awkwardness which promised well for the future but made her impossible for child parts. When this time came Phineas persuaded Amelia to put the child in a boarding-school in western Massachusetts.

"You've kept her too close," he said. "She must have more independent contact with her kind. A watched pot never boils, they say, and a child that's watched too closely never boils over as it should. We can't begin to educate Felicity until she's been turned loose and we've seen what her propensities are."

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Amelia fought this at first, until Phineas allowed himself a clinching argument.

"Dear lady," he said, laying a hand on her shoulder and shaking her gently by it, "what makes you think your dominance is good for the child, when you are so sure the old dominance was bad for her? You said you wanted to give her her chance. I say you're not doing it!"

That settled the matter, and to school Felicity went, while Amelia took a small house in Salem and acquired a cat, and sat down by her swept and lonely hearth to wait the passing of the years until Felicity should be with her again.

The Hilldale School for Girls was in the Berkshires; it was in charge of the Reverend Henry Candee Tutwiler, of the Congregational persuasion, who was ably seconded by Mrs. Tutwiler, head of the department of consolation and cheering advice, and by a corps of teachers, exclusively feminine and inclined to be middle-aged.

Felicity was looked upon with no little suspicion when her application for entrance was filed. The stage was rank in the nostrils of the Reverend Tutwiler, and he feared, moreover, that a majority of his patrons would be incensed if their offspring were brought in contact with a child of the theatre.

Amelia was enraged, and Felicity would never have gone to the Hilldale School for Girls had not the Reverend Tutwiler weakened when he

Felicity

heard of Felicity's strictly orthodox upbringing, and had not Amelia weakened when it was pointed out to her—not by the Reverend Tutwiler—that girls' schools inspired by a large world-wisdom and presided over by a fine catholic spirit, were so scarce that if she insisted on such an one, Felicity bade fair to live and die uneducated.

So, early in September of '71, Felicity being in her eleventh year, Amelia took her to Hilldale and left her; and that night in her Salem home where she arrived, unutterably weary and heart-sick, about eleven o'clock, Amelia Fergus for the first time since Cecile Fergus died went to sleep without Felicity beside her—and of all the hard things she had lived through, that was the hardest.

Nor did the separation grow one whit easier as the days went by. It seemed to Amelia that the ache of her desire was almost physical, as if the very nerves of her body cried out hungrily for the child's presence.

Every month she went to spend a Saturday and Sunday with Felicity, but the intervals between seemed interminable and vacant of diversion, let alone satisfaction; they were great voids, marked only by Felicity's letters.

“Dear, darling, preshus Aunt Elie,” the first one read, “I perfectly abhorr this place. You ought to see what they call appel sauce it is pieces

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of appel floating a round in swetish water. When anything is the matter with you Mrs. Tutwiler comes and says its nothing and tells you how many things has been the matter with her and Mr. Tutwiler and how brave they allways were. Ive cried every night since you left me hear and Mrs. Tutwiler says when she was my age she cried becaus their was no school for her to go to. I don't see why she tells me such things becaus I dont beleave them. Can't you write them a letter for me not to learn arithmetick I don't see any sense in it.

"Your darling child,

"FELICITY FERGUS."

"P. S.—Mrs. Tutwiler says is Felicity all the name youve got. I'm glad none of my name is Tutwiler."

Gradually, however, the joys of companionship began to balance Mrs. Tutwiler and the "appel sauce."

"Thear is a girl hear named Rosalie Beech she has seen me act," said the second letter, "she is a very nice girl. Some of the girls seam awful stupid they know thear lessons but they never been any place. They think I'm wonderfull becaus Ive been so many places. They havent read much either their is a big girl that never heard of Mary Queen of Scots she says she ain't had Scotch histry

Felicity

yet what do you think of that?" Letter number three was superbly sarcastic. "It seams," this letter read, "that its kind of a crime to laugh hear. Im being kept in my room this whole lovely long Saturday becaus I laughed last night. You see Fridays we have a funny thing thats called the elegunt deportmunt class we ware our best dresses I wore my pink nunsvaleing and have a kind of play although Mr. and Mrs. Tutwiler do not aprove of plays. The kind of play we had was that Mr. Tutwiler was the president of U. S. and Mrs. Tutwiler was Mrs. Grant and the teachers was cabinut ladys and we had to go in and act like we was at the white House it was awfull funny. Mr. Tutwiler didnt do right at all he called me madam so grand at least I guess he thought it was grand and I told him when I was at the real white House the presidunt Grant called me chicken. Mrs. Tutwiler was so funny I nearly died laughing and just for that I got sent to my room to stay till Sunday. I dont see how I can ever stay in a school whear its a crime to laugh. When I go home Ill show you how they did and see if you dont think its awfull funny."

Amelia sent this letter to Phineas, who laughed over it till he cried. He was to be in Philadelphia at the holiday time and he invited Amelia to bring Felicity and join him there.

The company had Christmas dinner, as usual,



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on the stage after the matinée, and tables were spread for "all hands" from Phineas to the scene-shifters and scrubwomen; and that there be no feeling of caste on this happy day commemorating a lowly birth, they drew dinner partners by lot and were apportioned to the several tables by the color of their flower favors.

Phineas was in his element. Like all great comedians of all times, in whatever branch of art, he was essentially and splendidly democratic. The world has never loved those who laugh at it, but to those who laugh with it it seldom refuses a palm. The mind that laughs at the world is aloof from the human comedy, an aristocrat in effect whatever its actual principles. The mind that laughs with the world must needs be of the world, touched with the world's failings, spurred with the world's desires.

Phineas's was such a mind and the democracy of the Christmas dinner was therefore no sham democracy, for the occasion only and like all seldom-worn manners ill-fitting and unmanageable. It was the kind of feast one never forgot though he lived to set ten thousand scenes or to eat dinner with all the world's celebrities.

When the last course was finished and the cigars were lighted, there were loud calls for the host, and deafening applause greeted him when he rose to answer the shrill cries of "Speech! Speech!"

Felicity

Then the juvenile lead sang, in a vigorous barytone, a rollicking popular song in the chorus of which all joined, the orchestra scrambling together for the accompaniment. The leading lady gave a take-off of a parlor elocutionist, and the little girl who had succeeded to Felicity's place did a fancy dance.

After this there were cries for Felicity, from members of the company who had been with Morton the year before. She hung back, pleading that she could do nothing, but Phineas suggested that she ought to do her share, that she was, for instance, perhaps the only one present who had ever been taught elegant deportment.

"I believe it would be very improving to a lot of vagabonds like us," he said, "if you would show us how really good behavior is taught."

His eyes were dancing with the spirit of fun and Felicity's flashed back at them in kind.

"If you'll be the little girl learning to behave," she said, "I'll be all the people in the receiving line, and show you how they did."

Whereupon Phineas pulled down on his forehead a long lock of that sparse, gray hair with which he made feint to cover his bald head, and set that wonderfully mobile face of his to so comical a representation of a silly little girl, that everybody shouted in gleeful appreciation before ever he had begun to act at all. He had not removed

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his make-up for the play, and as he went giggling and simpering down the imaginary line of the Tutwiler class in elegant deportment, he was so funny as to reduce his guests nearly to hysterics.

Instantly her comedy sense was appealed to, Felicity forgot everything else, and shyness fell from her as quickly as the sense of reverence did in church when the precentor looked like the Cheshire Cat, or as the sense of discipline did in school when the Reverend Tutwiler offered so comical a representation of President Grant.

To-night, with Phineas to spur her on, she abandoned herself to the mimicry of the Hilldale class in elegant deportment with a completeness which made her forget entirely where she was or who, besides her old "Pardner," was watching her.

First, she drew up her slender little person to represent the slim Tutwiler, and rubbed her hands in imitation of the unctuousness he could not lay aside even in personating the least unctuous of men—so that Phineas, watching her narrowly all the while he was playing his own part, marvelled at the child's instinctive understanding of the two so different personalities.

Then she puffed out in likeness of pudgy Mrs. Tutwiler, professional consoler; and pursed her lips as the ascetic Miss Hannah P. Bailey, instructor in mathematics, personating Mrs. Secretary of

Felicity

State; and folded her hands on her stomach as Miss Cordelia Atwater, teacher of grammar and rhetoric, personating Mrs. Secretary of War. Changing from character to character in a twinkling, her caricature was so perfect that one needed not to have seen the originals to believe in its utter faithfulness. As the juvenile lead and the director of the orchestra agreed, she was "simply immense."

When the applause had subsided, Phineas summoned all hands to a Virginia reel which waxed merrier and merrier until it wound up in a frolic out of which all scurried, breathless, to wings and dressing-rooms, at seven-thirty.

Phineas, being ready to go on, had no need to hurry, and lingered for a while to talk with Amelia and Felicity.

"Well, Pardner," he said to the latter, "I guess we can make a comédienne out o' you, all right. You seem to have the stuff in you. But you've a long, hard row to hoe if you're going to develop it.

"Now, I'll tell you what I'll do: If you'll work hard at school until June and learn what you can—if you don't like their deportment, see if you can't learn to like the way they spell—I'll take you to Europe in the summer. We'll go to see where your dear Queen Mary lived and where she lies dead; and we'll ride on top of all the 'busses there are, and watch folks, and develop our



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comedy sense all we can. Come, now, what do you say? Is it a bargain?"

It was, and they sealed it with a kiss.

In June they went abroad. The summer before Phineas had taken Frances Allston and her boys and had delighted in giving his daughter a season of the greatest possible change from Millville. This summer he did a characteristic thing: He wanted to take Felicity, he really coveted the pleasure of her blithe young companionship in his rambles about familiar places. But it was out of the question to take her alone and assume responsibility for her every minute. Phineas knew himself too well even to contemplate that. Also, he chuckled to find himself remembering, he could not take Amelia and Felicity; it would not do, for Amelia, and if it would, the arrangement would still have come far from suiting him. Amelia was an excellent woman, but the thought of trailing her about Europe for two months was insupportable, and she could not be left alone in hotels or pensions while he and Felicity enjoyed things together.

The only way out of the dilemma was an expensive way, but that never halted Phineas, whether he had the money or whether he had not. So he offered a trip to his widowed sister who had never been "back home" since she left there a bride of nineteen, and who accepted with an alacrity that

Felicity

might have been a little less if she had known that she was expected, besides lending countenance to the expedition, to keep Amelia company on mild, old lady-like excursions while Phineas tramped over his happy hunting-grounds hand in hand with sweet Felicity, or absented himself from all his guests in search of adventure with "big, black bears."

Nothing on earth was irksome to Phineas if he could take it or leave it at will, but the moment anything became obligatory, that moment he began to lay plans for its evasion. So, before he started for Europe, happy in the happiness he was giving, he had fixed things so that whenever he felt he must "slide out," he could, quite comfortably, without the fret of fearing that he was causing distress.

Thus fortified against the probability he dreaded most, Phineas gave himself over to enjoyment with all the ingenuous delight of a child. Nor did it ever enter his head to wonder if Sister Emmeline and Amelia would be congenial to each other, or if they would mind companioning together while he and Felicity went here and yon as fancy led them.

As a matter of fact, Amelia was disappointed not to have more of Felicity's company, and Sister Emmeline was disappointed not to be more frequently her brother's companion. But Phineas

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had a happy summer, and Felicity was the most radiant little creature in all Europe.

Phineas took her to Queen Mary's room in Holyrood where the murder of Rizzio had taken place and where, three centuries later, Robert Fergus had faced suddenly about, one day, and caught his first sight of Cecile McClintock. Amelia had desired with all her heart to be with Felicity when she first saw this room, but that happened to be one of the days when she was left to "sight see" in the company of Sister Emmeline. When she expressed her disappointment, Felicity promptly offered to go again "all alone" with her Aunt Elie, but though they did this, it was not an equivalent to Amelia, but only a concession to Felicity's distress.

They followed the trail of Scott in Edinburgh and Phineas told Felicity about Marjorie Fleming and read her Dr. John Brown's essay. He told her, too, of Scott's misfortunes and of his pluck in meeting them. And he filled her full of Burns as she could hold, for Phineas loved his Bobby as all the brothers of the open road have ever done. He told her of those things, as well as he could, wherefor Burns had been blamed by the censorious, and opined with splendid conviction that before a juster Tribunal they would count for naught beside his gifts of compassion and tenderness and the love of beauty, to humankind.

Felicity

In Paris he gave her a liberal education—far too liberal for her to comprehend, yet—in Balzac, whose genius he adored and whose life he found of interest paramount even to his work; and told her tale after tale of Molière—good and bad of him—and of Racine and of Rachel, and took her to the Comédie Française, where, among others, she saw Sara Bernhardt act.

“That child doesn’t understand a hundredth part of what you tell her,” said Sister Emmeline one day after she had come upon them in one of their “discussions.”

“Why, of course she doesn’t,” answered Phineas, as if surprised that any one should trouble to make so obvious an observation, “but she will, some day. Before her day’s done, little Felicity will understand a heap o’ things, and I’m priding myself that a good many times in the course of her life, after I’m dead and gone, she’ll say, ‘This reminds me of what The Old Man once said.’”

And so he went on talking to her of the good and bad in every one, of the deliciousness of the human comedy, and the value of sorrow to the world; and it was no wonder the child felt the fascination of his talk, for it was full of a witchery no one could have withstood. And all the while, Phineas was delightedly conscious how mixed was his pleasure in it—how half of it was the yearning tenderness of old age for youth, and half of it was

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the sheer, selfish joy of recapitulation, the old man's zest for dwelling in the past. Felicity had a way of inspiring in him those moods in which he most enjoyed himself, he reflected whimsically—and liked himself far better than if he had tried to make himself think his interest in the child was pure benevolence.

In London he took her over the Dickens haunts, telling her a hundred stories of that great comedian, not long dead, who had been his boon friend; and to the Bluecoat School and to the Charterhouse, and to the grave of a merry fellow named Goldsmith.

Late in August they sailed for home and when they landed got word of Jane Fergus's serious illness. Grandfather McClintock was in New York to meet them and to see his Cecile's child for the third time only, and he went with them at once to Millville, where Zilianne was in charge of the stark, silent house—Jane Fergus lay dead in the parlor, with the Covenanters looking down from the whitewashed wall.

Amelia, in all she had suffered these three years past, had never expected so agonizing a climax as this; it had never seemed possible to her that her mother should die estranged from her. None of the moves she had made toward reconciliation had met with the least encouragement; nevertheless she had always been sustained by the belief that sooner

Felicity

or later her mother would relent and be at peace with them. Now that this hope was dead, Amelia was racked by tortures of self-condemnation which made her friends fear, for a while, that she would lose her reason.

"I thought I was doing right when I went," she sobbed, over and over again to every one to whom she unbosomed herself, "I thought I owed what I did to Felicity, and to Robert, and to poor little Cecile. I'd never have done it if I'd thought it was wrong. Oh, why isn't there always a wrong way and a right way—one all wrong and one all right, and no mistaking them? Why, when we mean only the best and are willing to do right at any cost, ought things like this to happen to us?"

"The chances of the road!" said Phineas, when she asked him these torturing questions. "It's taking the chances handsomely that makes men and women of us. It's the brave spirit, unfaltering because the luck o' the road was rough, that's kept the old world a good place to live in, that's made the highway a road o' royal company. And if you expected Felicity to be great, you ought to have expected things like this. Nobody's *wafted* to the heights, dear lady; the climbing's rough and full o' perils."

There could be no question of separating Felicity from Amelia that fall, and of all the plans they



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discussed none seemed so feasible as Alec McClintock's proposition to take them both to Briarwood for the winter. The plantation was to be Felicity's some day, and it was high time she was getting acquainted with it, he said.

So they locked up the grim, gray house on Federal Street, and with Zilianne weeping joyously and sadly all at once, they turned their faces toward that strangely different home which had given Felicity one-half her heritage.

CHAPTER VII

THE GIRL WITH THE 'WITCHING SMILE

PHINEAS MORTON had that afternoon addressed Harvard College on "The Comedians," and had invited his grandsons, both at Harvard, to dine with him at the Parker House at five-thirty and occupy a box afterwards at the play.

"Bring four fellows," he said, "and let's have a good time."

The four fellows were easily persuaded, and much as they enjoyed themselves not one of them had so good a time as The Old Man. It was a jolly little dinner in the public dining-room where The Old Man nearly always ate, because he frankly did not mind the interested stares of his fellow-diners; people loved him, and he knew it, and no evidence of it ever annoyed him.

As for the four fellows, they could hardly give attention to the feast for watching the dining-room door in the hope that among the early comers would be some who would recognize them and whose envy of their distinguished company

The Girl with the 'Witching Smile

would make it trebly zestful. Phineas was keenly aware of this, and almost chuckled aloud when some one of them did know, came in and was greeted with a superb little nod, as from the Olympian heights.

"You know," said Phineas, addressing Morton in a pause, "that Felicity is with me again?"

"Yes, sir."

"I tried to get them to dine with us, but it seems they had asked some ancient crony of Miss Amelia's from Salem to dine with them. Have you seen Felicity?"

"No, sir; haven't seen her in two years, you know—not since she came up from Mississippi and got ready to go abroad."

"Well, you're going to be surprised. She's grown up, now."

"Why, she isn't sixteen, yet!"

"No, not till next March, but she looks a good deal older. She's the prettiest thing I ever saw in my life."

"Gee!" All the boys were listening, and the eager interest they showed when he spoke of prettiness, gave Phineas immense delight.

Then he told the four fellows about the Mary Stuart play, and raised a hearty, boyish laugh over the scenes of blood so mildly played.

"Little brick, Felicity was," Adams commented, "I remember when we tried to have a play after

Felicity

she left, and no girl would be the settler's wife and cross the ' Indian-harried plains ' in Mort's express wagon."

" Well, she's still a little brick, but she takes life very seriously now," said Phineas, his eyes twinkling. " She has arrived at the age where nothing will make her quite happy but a great o'erwhelming misery. If she doesn't find one pretty soon, I don't know what'll become o' the poor child. I don't suppose any o' you young gentlemen feel a chivalrous desire to provide her with the requisites for an unrequited passion, do you? No! I can see by your confused looks that every one of you is fully occupied in that direction. Keep occupied, boys! Falling in love's the best education a man gets—better than Harvard can give him. No fellow ever learns anything worth shucks while his heart's at ease; it's what we find out when the heart's anything but easy, that counts, in the long run. Now I must get off to the theatre. Come behind, after the play, and see Felicity. But if I don't see you fellows again, remember me by what I told you about hearts; there's nothing like Love's misery for making men."

After he was gone the boys sat on and smoked and talked, and there were one or two at least who seemed to have a little surplus of romantic interest not in service (as what man has not?) for they plied Morton and Adams with questions

The Girl with the 'Witching Smile

about Felicity. Was that her real name? How did she get it? Was she really pretty? Did their grandfather think she was going to be a great actress? And so on.

"We haven't seen her since she was thirteen," said Morton, with all the superiority of twenty years for the things of youth, "but she's said to promise great beauty and great talent. She's been in Europe for two years, studying and travelling, and only came back in time to join Gran's company in September. He's terribly interested in her and wants to give her some practical stage training of his own sort, so he hurried her back for fear another year might not find him on the boards. He's over seventy, you know."

On the way to the theatre, Morton stopped in a florist's and bought some pink roses which he sent back to Felicity "with the compliments of the killer," and to his delight she had one of the roses in her hair when she came on in her first scene, which was not until the second act.

She *was* pretty! Not one of the six fellows denied that, though three of them had sworn eternal fealty to the brunette type and one was thrall to eyes of blue.

Felicity's eyes were brown, deepest, sablest brown, with no glints of gold in them, and her skin was of the creamy tone that usually goes with such eyes. Her hair was a light brown, neither



Felicity

chestnut nor deepened blond, but a pale otter-color, wonderfully even in tone and silken in quality.

There was nothing vivid about her coloring, no dancing lights in hair and eyes. She wore a little stage-tint, of course, to keep her from looking pallid across the footlights, but not even enough of that to do more than nullify the rather ghastly hue of the stage-lights and the tin reflectors. Before she spoke, she gave the effect of being almost colorless, but when she smiled, one understood at once why Phineas had so implicit faith in her future. There was a witchery in that smile that the dullest never failed to feel, and Phineas was freshly delighted with every tribute to it.

"Nature is a great artist," he was wont to observe, "and she planned with 'mazing subtlety when she planned that child. Nothing more exquisite could be imagined than the way this little, pale flower of a girl, looking for all the world like a Botticelli Madonna, discloses a dancing, entrancing comedy spirit the moment her face lights up with a smile. Compared to the high-colored, buxom lady who is there, you know, to make you laugh, or the pale-colored, melancholy lady who is there, you know, to make you cry, the surprisingness of this Felicity is the most delicious thing I know. The little thrill of wonder she creates is sort o' personal to each one in her audience—each

The Girl with the 'Witching Smile

has a flattering idea that he alone has felt the subtlety of it. Oh, I tell you, it's great!"

And, now that their attention had been called to it, the boys found it so indeed, and after the last curtain almost tumbled upon the stage through the door just outside of their box; and all previous fealties whensoever declared, faded from memory while six fellows tried, collectively when must be, individually when could be, to bring smiles to that mouth that was made for smiles.

But Felicity was shy, even of Morton and Adams—which The Old Man, watching, thought was a pity considering her girlishness, but eminently fitting, considering her art.

"That shyness gives her complete cover while she steals upon you unawares with her charm. I'd hate like sin to have her get that kind of assurance of her fascinations that would lead her to rise up and hit you in the eye with them, as most women do," he reflected. "It'll be an artistic pity, actually it will, when she becomes famous, as she's bound to do, so that people will get to expecting things of her instead of letting her take them unawares."

That night six fellows dreamed of a slip of a girl with the 'witchingest mouth in the whole wide world and a pink rosebud in her pale brown hair.

Phineas, on request, had given each of the four strangers a photograph of himself autographed

Felicity

in his quaint, microscopic handwriting, and the next day Morton had to constitute himself a deputation to wait on "Gran" with a request for pictures of Felicity. Phineas, gravely concealing his delight, showed a photograph belonging to him and said he might be able to get six more like it. Yes, certainly, if Morton wanted this one very much he might take it, and Phineas would get another out of the lot requested for the fellows.

"It's so serious; it's not like her," objected one of the fellows when Morton displayed his treasure. Then Morton explained:

"Gran says she'll never have a smiling picture taken if he can help it," he said, "not even if a new Leonardo could paint her as a new Mona Lisa. He says the instant a smile becomes fixed it becomes odious."

This was a brand-new subtlety to Harvard upper-classmen, and one at least of these six went into his room, stared with positive resentment at the picture of a rollicking girl showing a major part of her fine teeth, and stuffed it behind a row of books. Another was heard to express lively impatience with a Cambridge young lady whose name came up in the course of conversation. "Silly little giggler!" he commented, ungallantly—forgetting that not a week ago he had lauded her "vivacity." If Phineas could have known



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these things his chuckling delight would have passed all bounds.

In due time, the five other photographs came, ornately autographed in flourishing letters, much "shaded," and were prominently displayed and much talked about, for a while. Then, also in due time, the girl with the fine teeth came out from behind the row of books again, and giggling reassumed its natural attractiveness in the eyes of exuberant youth, while Felicity became a pale memory, even to Adams and Morton, who had fitful correspondence with her. Correspondence counts for little compared with propinquity, when the heart beats young; perhaps, too, when it beats more soberly.

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CHAPTER VIII

VINCENT, THE DEBONAIR, DOES A GALLANT THING THAT'S FRAUGHT WITH DESTINY

"**W**ELL," said Jack Ashley, of the Morton company, "it never rains but it pours."

"What d'ye mean?" growled Vincent Delano, juvenile lead of the same company and laid up with a sharp attack of neuralgia in what he termed "this beast of a Cincinnati."

"It's a good thing," Ashley went on, ignoring the question, "that The Old Man's all the dear public comes to see, and that it cares precious little for anybody else, for there won't be much else to-night."

"What d'ye mean?" reiterated Vincent, through his ludicrous flannel swathings. "Just because I'm out?"

"No; Miss Fessenden's down and out, too—got a bronchial cold and can't speak above a whisper, and the little Fergus girl's got to play her part—rehearsal for all hands at four, even The Old Man, I hear," he finished, looking at his watch.

Vincent Does a Gallant Thing

"Gad! That's a kettle o' fish!"

"Bet you! As I say, though, except the girls, nobody cares who's on or off if The Old Man's there. But Crosby'll get all your incense. Gee! If some o' your crushes could see you now!"

"Shut up!" invited Delano. Then, "Nobody'll ever know I'm out, I suppose, but I'm darn sorry that nice little girl's got to play with that infernal fool, Crosby. He'll be so swollen with pride at a chance to disport himself in a real rôle, he'll never do a thing to make it easy for her. If I'd been playing I could have helped her a lot. She'll be scared to death, poor young one! And that ass'll never care for a thing but the impression he'll think he's making."

"That's right," assented Ashley, "what'd the Doc. say about you?"

"Said I mustn't put my fool face out o' the house for a couple o' days. Did me up in these blasted bandages. Say!" tearing them off with an impatient hand, "how do I look?"

"Oh, you look all right—your beauty's unimpaired, so far. How d'ye feel?"

"Like a house afire—never got a wink last night, walked the floor till broad daylight."

"Awfully sorry, old man! Anything I can do for you?"

"Nope, thanks."

"Well, I've got to hustle. Ta-ta!"

Felicity

Rehearsal was in full progress, under the personal direction of Phineas as well as of his stage manager, and Mr. Horace Crosby was standing in his entrance muttering the lines of his principal scene in Delano's part, when the stage door was flung open and a tall gentleman, muffled to the eyes, strode across the rear of the "set" and crowded into the entrance occupied by Crosby.

"All right, Crosby," he said, sharply, "I guess I can play." And when the cue came he went on, still muffled.

"Delano!" said Phineas, surprised; but Delano gave no sign of wishing to explain, and so the rehearsal proceeded, much simplified by his presence, for now there were only two to work in instead of four. He was on until the close of the act, and there was no opportunity to question him until then.

"I thought you were laid up, my boy," said Phineas, kindly.

"Well, I was; but when I heard about Miss Fessenden I came anyway—thought maybe you'd have a devil of a time with four understudies and only one rehearsal."

Phineas looked a little grave. "It is a mix-up," he said, "but they all seem to know their parts pretty well and there's no need of your taking this risk."

"Pshaw!" said Delano, "I guess I can stand

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it. That leaves only Miss Fergus's part to be filled—how've you managed that? "

"The local manager got a little girl in town—she's hard at it," and he pointed to the wings.

"Well, count me in—I guess I'm good for it."

"I'm not sure I ought to let you," Phineas began, but Delano was gone, into the wings to encourage Felicity.

"Now, you buck up, little girl," he told her, "and I'll play into your hand all I can."

He was as good as his word, and the rehearsal went off smoothly, heedless of Crosby's discomfiture.

Amelia, in Miss Fessenden's dressing-room, was sewing for dear life, taking in the leading lady's costumes to fit Felicity's far slenderer figure. A dinner was brought to her from a near-by hotel, at The Old Man's orders, and she snatched a bite now and then while she worked. The young girl hastily enlisted to play Felicity's part also dined from a tray—which looked as untouched when she was done as when it was laid before her. But Felicity went to the hotel with Phineas.

"You know your lines and your cues," he said, "now stop worrying; the rest'll come to you as you need it, or it won't come at all; but worry won't bring it, though it may keep it away."

Nevertheless Felicity worried. It was her first appearance in a part of any prominence. She had

Felicity

understudied Miss Fessenden faithfully, but never till to-night had there been need of her services.

The play was a pretty one, of The Old Man's usual type—he playing an old inventor of quaint, lovable character, and Felicity playing his elder daughter who is loved by a young man sent to buy for a pittance the patent in which his company sees millions, but which the old inventor has no means to develop for himself.

The inventor's younger daughter, who accidentally finds out the mean mission of the young man and tries to make her sister see him as he is, was the part usually played by Felicity, and in addition to her assumption of the more important rôle, she had to coach the stranger in the minor one and to rehearse with her many times the main scene between the sisters.

No one in the great audience that greeted Morton that night had any suspicion of the flurry that preceded the rising of the curtain, nor of the icy coldness of the hand which his elder daughter laid on the inventor's brow as she made her first entrance saying, "How's my dear old daddy this morning?"

It was The Old Man himself on whom all eyes were riveted; it was his voice, quavering, now, with no simulation of age, but rich and vibrant still, that filled the ears of the audience. Something infinitely benign emanated from him, always—

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something that made the laughs he raised without a sting and the tears he brought without bitterness, and sent every one away from him with a kindlier feeling toward the whole, wide world.

He was playing well, to-night, so well that even Felicity forgot herself and her fright several times in loving admiration of his perfect art—art that was so near to nature and so inevitable an expression of his own nature that one could not say where the art left off and the nature began, and some people denied him any art at all, because he only gave expression to himself—which was no trick at all, they held, though still they went to see it done.

Poor Delano suffered tortures with his face, but he played as if neuralgia were unknown until after the third act when, to his immense disgust, he fainted in his dressing-room.

Felicity heard of it while she was dressing for the last act.

“Mr. Ashley says Mr. Delano insisted on playing because he could make it easier for you, Miss Fergus,” said the dresser, who was serving Felicity. “I’d never have thought it of him,” the woman went on, “and him so spoiled and run after by the girls, and his head so turned by his good looks. But it just goes to show you never can tell,” was the moral reflection. “I call it real heroic of him.”

For a few minutes it looked as if Horace

Felicity

Crosby would have to go on in the last act in Vincent's stead, but there was no scene for the leading man until the latter part of the act, and long before the cue came, Vincent was in his entrance, waiting.

It was the scene where all is righted and love triumphs over all obstacles. It had been almost funny, this afternoon, when the lover, wrapped to the eyes to protect his aching face from the chill of the draughty stage, had gone through the final scene with Felicity. But now, there was something underneath the pretty fervor of it that no one but the two concerned knew.

In a moment when the lovers are supposed to be talking earnestly apart, Felicity looked up into Vincent's handsome face, pale under its cosmetic flush, and with eyes shining like stars whispered:

"Oh, it was so good of you! I can never thank you enough—to suffer so, and all to help me through!"

"Pshaw!" said Vincent, lightly, in funny contrast to his pantomime of deep feeling, "you make too much of it—it was only the decent thing to do. And besides," his old, unconquerable gallantry rising in spite of him, "how do you know how much I wanted to play the part with you?"

Then their cue came, and the last scene—where the old inventor, properly rewarded and made happy at last, seeing how matters are with the

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lovers, slips quietly and half-wistfully away, closing the door very slowly, with a lingering look full of the tenderness of ripe age on the rosy-hued young love left behind, and after a tense moment the curtain goes slowly down on the lovers, locked in each other's arms.

It was, in Felicity's eyes, the chief of all the race of heroes who held out his arms to her on the stage that night. And there was something in the wholly shy, yet wholly glad little move she made toward him that thrilled the audience with the sweetness of love's surrender.

When the curtain went down there was a brief instant of waiting for it to rise again, a brief instant in which Vincent, holding the slender little figure to him, felt the arms that clasped his neck tremble and, looking into the velvety brown eyes upraised to his, saw in them a wonderful light of newly awakened consciousness that smote him—happy-go-lucky, unthinking fellow that he was—with a sense of awe.

"Golly!" he murmured to himself, "what's come over the child?"

But in his heart he knew.

Miss Fessenden's cold kept her speechless for two weeks. She was by no means ill enough to stay behind the company when it left Cincinnati, and every day she hoped the next would find her

Felicity

better. But for a whole fortnight Felicity played her part, and played it prettily.

Delano succumbed to his ailment for two performances subsequent to that eventful night, and Crosby fulfilled all expectations by making the most of the occasion to display his own talents, regardless of Felicity. But Felicity did not care—then. She pretended he was Vincent, and the play went smoothly. She told herself she must do her best for his sake who had suffered so much for her; and the thought lent unlimited zest to her acting.

The second night of Vincent's absence, as she and Amelia were leaving the theatre, Jack Ashley overtook them.

"Going to see Delano," he said. "I'll tell him how bully you've been doing, Miss Fergus. Any message you'd like to send?"

"Tell him," began Felicity, and her heart fluttered, "tell him, I hope he'll soon be well."

"Oh, all right! I'm taking him his mail—see!" And he held up a bundle of thirty or forty letters tied together with a stout string. "I can't tell his friends' letters from his mash notes, so I have to take 'em all."

"Does he—does he get that many every day?"

"Oh, I guess! These are two days' mail, but he gets an awful lot. The women are crazy about him, you know—send him flowers and gold match-

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safes, and scarf pins and cuff buttons, and what not."

There was a bluff contempt in Ashley's tone which Felicity was not shrewd enough to understand.

"And does he—does he like it?"

"Why, sure! it's a kind o' nuisance sometimes, but I guess he knows that it's what keeps him a leading man. Well, ta-ta!" And Ashley was off, turning a sudden corner, where their ways diverged.

"*I think Mr. Delano's a fine actor,*" observed Felicity, gravely, "and I don't believe he likes those horrid letters."

It is not always credible to an outsider how strange players in the same company may be to one another. Felicity really knew as little about Vincent Delano as the average city-bred house-dweller of the better sort knows about his next-door neighbors.

Her part in the play was small; indeed, as in most companies where the star is so pre-eminent, none of the other parts was extremely important, notwithstanding Phineas's fine theories about the value of his support. When Felicity was not on, she was in her dressing-room with Amelia, who never let her go to the theatre alone. In this cluttered box of a place which she had to herself

Felicity

only by the intervention of The Old Man, they read, practised French conversation, sewed or mended, or otherwise employed the time.

Vincent, in his dressing-room which he shared with Ashley, played cards or shook dice or read the daily and weekly papers, or even took cat naps if he were what he termed "short on sleep."

When he and Felicity were on together, they were strictly business; when they met and passed in the wings they exchanged nods and smiles, sometimes, and at rehearsals, which were not frequent, they chatted, now and then, in a desultory sort of way.

It seldom happened that they went to the same hotel or boarding-house, but if they did, they were as little likely to meet as if they were under different roofs. And when the company was travelling (which was nearly always by night) Vincent was usually either sleeping or smoking. Even Miss Fessenden Felicity knew but slightly; she and a Miss Croftleigh, who played old woman parts, were chummy, with an inexhaustible fund of mutual interest in stage gossip about a hundred persons who were mere names, or less, to Amelia and Felicity.

It was a lonely, almost an excessively lonely life the two Ferguses led, and it seemed as if they would never grow used to its lack of those tender ties and associations which make life sweet to most women.

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Amelia had never known many intimates; people did not get intimate with the Ferguses, and for the most part the Ferguses had not cared. Jane had not, surely; nor Robert, who was too repressed and shy for success in social intercourse, and knew it. But Amelia had always cared. She had a strongly developed social instinct, to which everything in her experience had contributed denial.

Now, at nearly three score years, she had ceased to hope for a life rich in relationships, and such yearnings as she had for the common lot related to places, not persons. She wanted a spot she could call her own—an abiding-place—but she knew that in all human probability she would never have it.

And most of all she longed, with the wistful longing of life's afternoon for the places where it knew the morning shine, for the four-square house on Federal Street, for the black horse-hair suit in the chill-looking, whitewashed parlor with the "Covenanters Worshipping in a Cave" looking down from the wall.

But the old house belonged to strangers, now, and was full of romping children. And out in the Millville Cemetery, where Felicity had been made to promise that Amelia should lie some day, the turf was sunken on Jane Fergus's grave.

There was one little incident of that winter Felicity never forgot. They were playing a pretty

Felicity

long series of one-night stands and everybody was fagged and more or less out of sorts when they reached a small southern town one bleak morning about six o'clock. Morton seldom played this outlying circuit, but there had been an enormous demand for him, and he was trying to meet it, as it was certain he would not pass this way again. And he had a romantic satisfaction in these triumphs, for over this ground he had played in some of his most despairing days.

The night before, they had been obliged to catch a train at 12:45, after a performance on which the curtain, owing to some unavoidable delay, did not rise until nearly nine. Set by set as it served its purpose, the scenery was taken down and carted to the train, and at the last there was a mad scramble to get effects together and trunks packed, so that most of the company still wore stage-paint when they tumbled, wearily, into the station at a quarter to one, with the prospect of changing cars at four o'clock. Special trains for theatrical companies were then unheard of.

At six, on a chill, gray morning, they arrived in a town whose one fair-to-middling hotel had recently burned, so that they were driven, for shelter, to several small and no less than wretched hostelrys where hard beds and damp sheets were not enough to keep the exhausted actors longer awake.

About ten o'clock Felicity woke to find that

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Amelia had been up and stirring for some time and had, undaunted by the utter meanness of their room, made her usual effort to give it, even if only for a few hours, some look of, as she said, "a decent woman's abiding-place."

She had unpacked their hand satchels and arranged their little toilet necessities on bureau and washstand; had shoved the blatant cuspidor out of sight, and hung up on wall-pegs their hats and wraps, and laid out, ready for wear, Felicity's slippers and dressing-gown.

These things done, she sat down by the window to read. They never failed to carry a good book or two with them, and whatever else Amelia brought or left, she was seldom without her worn, two-volume copy of the "Life and Letters of Margaret Fuller Ossoli," published under the direction of Emerson and Channing in 1852. This was almost a Bible to her, and in the same spirit in which she might have taken up the Bible she had gone, now, to this outpouring of the heart of that wonderful, wistful woman who was willing to adventure so bravely in her quest for the highest altitudes of love.

She closed the book as Felicity arose, marking her place with a bit of paper.

"I'm dressed, so I'll go down and see what I can do about some breakfast," she said. "There's no such thing here as bell service."

Felicity

She was gone a long time, and when Felicity had washed as well as she could in a basin of cold water, and donned her loose gown and slippers, she sat down at the window in her aunt's vacated chair, smiling a little sadly at the shabby volume with its worn black binding.

Picking it up, she opened to her aunt's place as indicated by the marker, and her eye fell on these words:

"There comes a consciousness that I have no real hold on life—no real, permanent connection with any soul. . . . I do not know how I shall go through this destiny. I can, if it is mine; but I do not feel that I can."

"I wonder why Aunt Elie likes to read this book so much," the girl pondered, "it makes me feel so sad."

She was putting the marker back when she noticed its look of age and the faded ink of the writing it bore, so she picked it up again for a closer scrutiny. It was headed "Rules for Right Living," and in Amelia's younger and firmer handwriting was a schedule for what she had evidently thought an ideal day.

"Six, arise," it said; "six to six-thirty, bathe and dress; six-thirty to seven, morning reading and reflection; seven, breakfast; seven-thirty, morn-

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ing prayers; eight to ten, household duties; ten to twelve, reading, study and correspondence; twelve, dinner; one to three, visit the sick and needy," and so on.

While she was reading it, Amelia returned.

"What's this?" she asked.

Amelia flushed a little, and laughed. "A' relic of my proper young ladyhood," she said. "I had just laid down those rules for myself when I got this book, and I kept them in it. Every time I see them they stir up such tender recollections of 'all I aspired to be' that I can never bear to throw them away or put them elsewhere."

"Darling Aunt Elie!" Felicity cried—woebegone with the discomforts of their situation and realizing in a degree she had not felt before what those discomforts must mean to Amelia, "how you love the orderly quiet life you left for me! And, oh! I'm afraid it hasn't been worth the sacrifice! The game hasn't been worth the candle!"

"Yes, it has, dear," soothed the woman, holding the girl to her and not knowing, as Phineas would have known, that Felicity's tears were, inevitably, more in self-pity than in compassion, "yes, it has, dear. It's always worth the candle to have played the game, I guess—whether one wins or loses. But we're going to win," she finished, with such conviction that Felicity believed her.

CHAPTER IX

"THE BIG OPEN ROAD, WHERE THE PASSPORT
IS SYMPATHY"

VINCENT DELANO sat at his dressing-table, chin in hands and elbows on the table, moodily reflectful. He was not altogether pleased with life today, though evidences of his popularity lay thick about him. Perfumed notes strewed the floor like leaves in autumn; of bouquets, very elegant in their lace-paper frills, he had no fewer than a baker's dozen ("bad luck!" he had growled, with an actor's ready superstition, when the thirteenth came; no use, then, to order it out—something was after him!) and in the heap of their tissue-paper wrappings, and other rubbish, were a lot of silly girls' and women's photographs, torn, each, in several bits, for Vincent was decently scrupulous. That these women had no self-respect never made him unchivalrous toward them, whatever his secret contempt of their folly.

A small table at his right was littered with poker chips, cards, cigar ashes, and two drained glasses stood by a half-emptied bottle of rye whiskey. The

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narrow shelf in front of him bore a disorder of make-up materials and toilet articles of a dandified elegance—gifts of tribute, mostly.

Nevertheless, Vincent scowled darkly at the debonair gentleman in the mirror, whose long, curling black lashes scarcely needed the accentuation of a pencil any more than his naturally ruddy coloring really needed the offices of paint.

Nature had designed Vincent for just such a rôle as he was filling. Those great Irish-blue eyes and that dark, wavy hair were never intended to adorn a sardonic temperament. Vincent was made to gamble and to flirt, to sing merrily and spend freely, to be generous yet selfish—which is to say, open-handed but vain.

"Dog-gone it!" he muttered, putting his hands in his trousers pockets and stretching his long length as far under the table as it would go.

The occasion for this momentary dissatisfaction with life was an interview Vincent had had, a half hour ago, with Miss Fessenden.

There was a flirtation on between the leading lady and the juvenile lead. It wasn't serious, but it was fairly beguiling. When one is knocking around the world, here to-day and gone to-morrow, it is comfortable to have some one of mutual interests, with whom to take bite and sup now and then in the absence of any royal entertainer who combines the virtues of congeniality and willingness

Felicity

to foot the bill; some one with whom to go to the races, if there are any, or even to the art museum, if worst comes to worst in a dull town.

Vincent played poker and billiards with Jack Ashley, and played at being interested in Miss Fessenden—not because he particularly admired her, but because she was there and the choice was not great; Miss Croftleigh was peculiarly disagreeable to him, and little Felicity was “not his sort at all,” as he put it. Still, since that night in Cincinnati, Vincent could not help showing a decent kindness to the little ingénue who so sweetly worshipped him. Heaven knew he did nothing to encourage her, but one need not be a brute! To-day, though, Editha Fessenden had taunted him about Felicity. It was her pet reproach to call him a “curled darling.” This afternoon, after a failure on Vincent’s part to measure up to her expectations of ardent interest, she had had recourse to her favorite upbraiding.

“Oh, very well!” she had flung at him, hotly, “it’s no more than I might have looked for from you. To get on with you, now, one must crawl on all fours and lick your hand like a dog. But you’ll get none o’ that from me! *My name’s not Felicity Fergus!*”

“What d’ye mean?” Vincent feigned a surprise outweighing resentment.

“Huh! You know well enough what I mean.

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But you can't get any o' that 'round-eyed worship out o' me! You never ignored an attack of neuralgia to help *me*, on a pinch, y' know! ”

And with that she had left him in a petty rage the public little suspected when it saw them together in their principal love scene, a few minutes later.

Now, in the first quiet moment he had had, Vincent was trying to recapitulate.

Pshaw! Editha Fessenden couldn't sting him with her jealous rages. But it was a shame that Felicity's little girlish fancy should be obvious to a woman like Editha. “It's all right for me to know it,” Vincent told himself; “I understand what it's worth. She—why, she's no more than a child, a baby. I'm flattered by her liking, same as I am when a youngster likes me, or a dog, or a kitten—it makes me feel kind of as if there must be something good inside me. And I know it won't hurt her, for I won't let it—no sir! I may be a ‘curled darling,’ but I know what's the decent thing to do, and I do it! But Editha Fessenden could hurt her so she'd never get over it—yes, and she will, too, some o' these days, if she gets a chance; some day when I don't dance to suit her, she'll take it out on that child. By George! It's a shame! Confound her!”

“Your scene, Mr. Delano,” said the call boy, rapping. And still pondering—a most unusual

Felicity

occupation for him—Vincent strode out, banging the door to behind him.

Felicity was standing in the wings. She had an exit and an entrance so close together that it did not pay to go back to her dressing-room for the interval.

"I've something to tell you," she whispered, as he waited beside her for his cue.

"All right." He nodded, smiling, and went on.

Her eyes, smiling back at him, were so sweetly worshipful that Vincent forgot to be flattered in thinking how liable to hurt the innocent ingenuousness of this thing made her. Something vague stirred his memory, something about an actor who was past master of the decent thing to do. Who was it? Oh, yes—Garrick! He'd seen Sothorn play it. Ought a fellow to do something like that?

One of the things that contributed most to Vincent's happiness was his ability to keep on good terms with himself. His code might not have been altogether an intelligible one to a good many people, but it satisfied him thoroughly and gave him as much pleasure when he lived up to it as if it had been a great deal more elaborate and more reasonable. He liked himself for the handsomeness of his attitude toward Felicity—liked himself so well that he forgot his irritation of a few moments before, and when he came off from his

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scene he was in high good humor on account of what he meant to do.

"Well, what is it?" he asked Felicity, when they were both at leisure for a few minutes. "Good news?"

"No—funny news. I've had an offer to head a company."

"What?"

"To head a company—to play *Lady Macbeth* and *Fanchon the Cricket* and *Meg Merrilies* and *The New Magdalen* and—and other assorted rôles, in *Medicine Hat* and *Hushpuckena* and *Dead Men's Gulch*."

Her eyes were so full of shine and her voice was so full of quaver that Vincent did not know, for a moment, whether she was insulted or elated. As a matter of fact, she was neither, but excited to be talking to him, and trembling with the hope that he would cry, "Don't go!" Instead, he remarked:

"That 'd be bully training, you know."

"I know; but I don't want to go."

"Why not?"

"Well, because—I'd hate to leave *The Old Man*."

Vincent could hardly keep from smiling at the child's lack of artifice, but he ignored the telltale look in her eyes, the tremulous little quivering at the corners of the lovely mouth, and professed to take her remark seriously.

Felicity

"Oh, he wouldn't want you to let that stand in your way."

"No, I know; but——"

"Ah!" banteringly, "but you're afraid he won't get on without you!"

Felicity smiled, and Vincent remarked to himself that she looked so pretty when she smiled it was a pity she did not do it oftener. Then, smitten with a sudden inspiration of "the decent thing to do," he said:

"Don't you think we'll forget you if you go. Tell you what I'll do, if you want me to: I'll write you a letter every week and keep you posted on all that's happening."

"Will you?"

The eagerness of her tone made Vincent very gratified to have been so magnanimous, for he hated to write letters, and in a glow of fine feeling he held out his hand. "Let's call it a bargain," he said.

"It's a bargain," said Felicity, half happy and half heart-broken, with the broken-heartedness of sixteen in love.

Now, in consultation with Phineas and Amelia, Felicity had exhibited a not unnatural disinclination to accept the offer made her so unexpectedly.

"I don't see how they ever came to pick you for the purpose," said Phineas, untruthfully, for he knew all about it—had had a hand in it—"for

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you're not altogether a likely lookin' chicken, yet, and don't suggest, to me at least, the average leading lady of the frontier circuit. But there's no doubt in the world that it's an opportunity for you, and will do more toward the making of you than a whole lifetime of playing polite little rôles in a company like mine. If I live longer 'n I have any right to expect, and keep on acting, I might be able to give you Miss Fessenden's place in a couple o' years or so. But that's the best I could ever do for you, and it would never help you to be a great comédienne. You know what I've told you about Dick Sheridan and Goldsmith and Balzac and Molière and other folks who knew the human comedy. You know the school they learned it in. Well, you can't learn the same lessons in any other school. If you're going to be anybody, you've got to get out and *be* it. If you're going to delineate life, you've got to get out where life's elemental and you can learn the A B C's of it."

"I don't know," said Felicity, who had seen something of the terrors of the road this season, "that I want to be anybody, after all."

"Yes," commented Phineas, dryly, "we all feel that way a good deal of the time. It's a lot o' trouble, this being somebody, but those that can be, don't often quit, and those that can't be, never leave off wishing they could. Nobody's satisfied, that I can find out, but those that come nearest to

Felicity

it are the folks who have never tried to be anybody, yet feel sure they could have been anything they'd had a mind to. If what you want is satisfaction, you'd better quit right now, and live out your days in the smug conviction that you could have been a great comédienne if you'd taken the trouble."

The subtlety of this advice was beyond Felicity, but she winced under its irony.

"I'll think about it," she said, soberly, as she went her way.

That evening Amelia watched for an opportunity to speak to Phineas. Sometimes for a week at a time she and Felicity would see him at the theatre only, and would have no more conversation with him than with any other person in the company. Again, there might be several times in a week when he would take them to dine or lunch with him, or would come from his hotel to their modest boarding-house and get Felicity for a ramble or a visit to some place of interest, or take her with him to some function given in his honor and—usually—to his immense boredom unless he had Felicity with him to see the comedy of the thing with his eyes.

Lately, he seemed to have been bear-hunting, as he called it, a good deal of the time. Twice within a week, Amelia knew, the curtain had been held until half-past eight because Phineas could

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not be found until nearly that hour. He was never the least shamefaced about these delinquencies, but would say quite frankly, with his delicious, whimsical smile, that “the name of the bear was ‘Jack-pot,’ ” or “John Barleycorn,” or “Fast and Furious,” and remark whether “I got him ” or “he got me.”

“Ten to one on ‘Fast and Furious,’ and made a hundred,” he’d call in cheerily to Delano and Ashley, as he passed their dressing-room, half an hour late. Or, “Just lost two hundred and fifty on a full house, queens high; that’s what comes o’ betting on the ladies!”

Amelia’s attitude toward these things she was born and bred to abhor, was interesting in the extreme. Nothing in the roughness of the road ever tempted her for an instant to “travel easy,” but while she still held certain things as unpermissible as ever for herself, she was no longer persuaded that every one who practised those things was wholly culpable. She regretted Phineas’s “bears,” but she not only had by now a firm conviction in his goodness immeasurably outweighing his badness, she even had some apprehension of his goodness being in a mysterious alchemy of human nature an outcome of his badness, or t’other way round, and was beginning to understand for the first time in her life why God so often chooses faulty men for His big purposes.

Felicity

Phineas Morton had altered for her not only the whole world that was, but the world that had been, and had given her a comprehending delight in a thousand great fellowships she could never have enjoyed but for him. The world-old anomalies of his character served an interpretative purpose for her in a long range of human complexities from Adam to Goethe; she knew them all better for having known The Old Man.

"I'm worried about Felicity," she told him when she had managed to find him alone.

"What about her?"

"Why——" Amelia had the spinster delicacy about such things, and she flushed a little as she answered, "I think she's in love."

Phineas threw back his head and roared—a thing he seldom did, for his humor was essentially of the quiet kind and expressed itself more readily in chuckles than in roars. But Amelia was so funny in her very real concern that he laughed uproariously.

"The deuce you do!" he exclaimed, tearful with amusement. "And what else should she be, at sixteen, I'd like to know?"

"How can a girl of sixteen know what love is?"

"She can't, dear lady, she can't! But there'll never be another time in her life when she'll be so sure she does know. And, mercy me! they've got to live through it, same as measles. Who's he?"

“The Big Open Road”

“Mr. Delano. She sleeps with his picture under her pillow.”

“Bully! That’ll do her a world o’ good.”

“I can’t see how. It looks to me as if she were breaking her heart about him.”

“Well, what of it? Isn’t it the chief business of sweet sixteen to break its heart about somebody? And isn’t it the lifelong business of an actress to keep her heart broken, somehow or other?”

“I didn’t know that it was.”

“Well, take my word for it. Women at ease with their hearts—if there’s any such thing—never do anything. If Felicity’s going to be a great comédienne she’s got to break her heart, not once, but a good many times, and it’s none too soon to begin. There’s no comedy in life more than a hair’s breadth removed from tears, and all the best laughs the world has ever raised have been raised by men—and a few women—who knew sorrow better ’n they knew joy. I don’t deny the very real suffering of sixteen in hopeless love. But, Ephraim Manasseh! there’s nothing in life more delicious than recalling those pangs, afterwards, and watching other young things in the throes. No one ought to miss that vital part of his education. As between college and calf love, I always say a man may be a good deal of a man without college, but without calf love—never!”

Amelia felt, as she often did in talking with

Felicity

Phineas, a great self-pity for the rigid restrictions of those early years when she, too, might have been suffering and enjoying things that would have given her an active membership in the everlasting company playing the *comédie humaine*. Those starved years were doubly pitiful, for they not only passed without eventfulness, but they had left her without recollections—such recollections as she ought to have had to make her kin with the majority.

“Then you wouldn’t do anything about it?” she asked, less anxiously.

“Not a thing in the world, unless to encourage it—though, of course, opposition’s the likeliest way to do that. Delano’s an ideal object for those sighs which are as developing to character as a baby’s crying is to its lungs. He’s a decent chap, and he’s safe. Oh, Lordy! he’s safe, all right! He’s bored to death with sweet sixteen—though he wouldn’t wish not to be, of course!”

It was after this that Vincent gave his fillip to the situation and Felicity exhibited, all of a sudden, a mysterious willingness to go on that far adventuring. She was to begin rehearsing in Boston, in August, and in September would start for the far western and southwestern circuit, playing repertoire.

Phineas tried his best to persuade Amelia to let the girl go alone, but she would not hear of it.

“How’ll she ever know if she can swim,” he

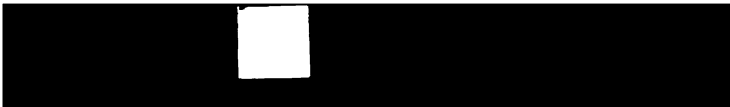


“The Big Open Road”

asked, “if you keep a life-preserving aunt tied around her waist all the time?”

“How do I know she won’t drown without learning?” retorted Amelia.

“Well, perhaps you’re right,” said The Old Man, “perhaps you’re right. God knows it’s a rough life out there, but what I’m afraid of for her is not that she’ll get rough, but that she won’t learn to see through the roughness to the worth that’s always underneath. To be perfectly frank with you, dear lady, I’m afraid that without meaning to, you’ll make her supercilious about the human nature she’ll be brought in contact with; that you’ll keep her aloof and read Emerson to her, instead of letting her rub along cheek by jowl with humanity as she finds it in those unvarnished outposts. Of course it’s a fly-by-night existence and you never strike root anywhere, but even in flight you can learn things, if you will. Now, I don’t want Felicity to lose contact with civilization, out yonder, but I want you to promise me, cross-your-heart-and-hope-to-die-if-you-don’t-do-it, that you’ll so far forget Federal Street as to keep in mind that although Felicity was born there, she has elected to be a child of the road, the big open road, where the passport is sympathy and understanding, not criticism of the way the other travellers limp along on tired feet or dance for paltry joys. I want her to learn to see past all the surface things to the thing that



Felicity

matters in each fellow-creature. I've put in seventy years at that, and I know it's worth while. I'd give her my knowledge for a heritage if I could, but it wouldn't do her any good. More than any other kind o' knowledge, it's the seeking of it that counts for most. My heartbreaks won't help her much, nor will yours. Don't forget that, and don't try to deny her the right to break her own heart."

"I won't," promised Amelia, knowing full well how hard the promise would be to keep, but meaning to keep it.



PART II

TWELVE YEARS LATER





CHAPTER X

ALL THAT GLITTERS IS NOT HAPPINESS

UGH! what a day!" said Felicity, shivering and withdrawing deeper into her fur wrappings, even in the heated brougham.

February was holding high carnival of horrors in Chicago where a gray day was waning into early blackness. The sleety rain that had been falling was turned, now, into slushy snow which spattered in big blobs against everything, melting soon afterwards and adding rapidly to the ankle-depth of icy mire through which horses and pedestrians splashed forlornly.

The billboards announcing Felicity Fergus were soaked until they wore a blistered appearance, and as the carriage turned into Michigan Avenue Felicity noted that the lake was indistinguishable from the pall of leaden sky.

She had played in Indianapolis Saturday and had stayed over Sunday to rest and visit friends, her company coming on by an early train Sunday morning.

Her personal representative had met her at the

Felicity

train, seen to the immediate delivery of such baggage as she had with her, and sent her maid ahead in a cab with the hand satchels.

"Every seat sold for to-night, though, if the weather is beastly," he answered.

"I think you'll find everything as you like it," he said as they drew up to the hotel, "but if you don't, we'll soon have it so. My room is 841, and I'll stay within call until you say you don't want me—then go over to the theatre."

Celeste, the maid, had reached the rooms not ten minutes before Miss Fergus, but was already deftly unpacking dressing cases and putting things to rights when Felicity came, and when Mr. Leffler opened the door for her the place had begun to have that air of homeliness which luxury so sadly lacks until it has been adapted.

In the drawing-room a brilliant fire snapped and sparkled, and drawn up before it was a big easy-chair and a tabourette with a silver tea service and a bundle of letters. For the rest, the room seemed to be a bower of flowers which had been coming all day and which Mr. Leffler had disposed in innumerable vases requisitioned from the house-keeper.

"I've left the cards by the vases until you saw them," he said. "I'll gather them up and write acknowledgments whenever you say."

"To-morrow will do, thank you." She was

that Glitters Is Not Happiness

ing about examining the cards before she took tea. Mr. Leffler had seldom seen her take much interest in this common occurrence of being smothered in flowers.

"Wasn't there a box of pink roses?" she asked, with a card from Mr. Allston?"

"I put them in yonder," he answered, indicating with a nod her bedroom. There, on her dressing-table, where Celeste had her array of glittering silver spread on her own lace scarf, a tall vase of splendid La France roses nodded at their reflection in the big mirror.

"Dear old Morton!" thought Felicity, "dear old 'killer'! He's a *friend*; these other people are only acquaintances. I'd have been disappointed if he'd forgotten me."

"The other offerings to date," said Mr. Leffler, preparing to withdraw, "are: seven varieties of cream, three hair tonics, two boxes of toilet soap, a new breath perfume, and a patent bath-tub—all 'come early to avoid the rush' in application for your indorsement."

Felicity laughed. "No tooth paste or powder?" she said, "not a single reference to 'the well-known charms of my celebrated smile'?"

"Not yet."

"Dear me! Business must be falling off, or the dress agent must have forgotten something."

"Oh, they'll come all right; never fear,"

Felicity

laughed the young man as he closed the door behind him.

Yes, they would come! Felicity did not fear she had no hope of escaping them. What The Old Man had dreaded had abundantly come true: her smile was famous in two continents, and she had grown so unutterably sick of hearing about it that she felt sure the whole world must be sick of too. Public clamor about her charm had robbed it of nearly all its subtlety, but she had now grown shrewd enough to know that only an infinitesimal part of the public cares for subtlety, anyway, and kind enough to recognize that the intent in praising her was good even if the results were, to her notion, pretty dreadful. She winced under praise far oftener than she glowed under it, but so did every one, presumably.

An hour later, refreshed by her tea and her bath she was resting, before eating a light dinner, when her maid answered a knock at the door and brought her a note in a card envelope.

The pencil scrawl on the card was almost illegible in its wavering uncertainty, but she made out

"I am very ill. Can you come to me?"

"ADELAIDE WALTERS."

"Tell Miss Walters 'Yes,'" she called, passing Celeste, to the page, "what number is her room?"

"Ten hundred and twelve," said the boy, with

All that Glitters Is Not Happiness

the air so quickly acquired by menials in a big hostelry when referring to a cheap room.

"I'll be there directly," Felicity sent word.

When Celeste had feed him and closed the door, Felicity looked inquiringly at her array and then at the maid.

"I can't go through the halls like this," she said, "and I don't want to wait till I dress."

"Madame can wear this," said the woman, returning from the bedroom with a long, enveloping black silk cloak which she laid about Felicity over her negligée.

"Shall I accompany Madame?"

"No. And I'll not be long. I can't be!"

Adelaide Walters was playing an old woman part in the Fergus company. In her day she had "played many parts," with a majority of the leading players of her time, and had been a much-fêted woman. Now she was old, and the generation of play-goers that had lauded her prime was passed to the shelter of the fireside, or to a more restful shelter still; but she had little laid up for her old age, and even if she had had much more the habit of the road was strong in her and she was, on the whole, happier wandering than she could have been at rest.

One of the few indulgences she allowed herself as her earning ability decreased to mere livelihood,

Felicity

was keeping up her old custom of staying at the same hotel with the star. She had to take the cheapest room, and more often than not ate at dingy little cafés and restaurants and made street cars serve where cabs had once been thought a necessity. But she got her mail at the best hotel in town and in its parlors received her few friends and old-time admirers; and her pride was kept tolerably alive by this pitiful little pretence. She would have had more sheer comfort and a deal more companionship in an actors' boarding-house, but it was her little pet folly to despise them, and everybody smiled at the folly and thought no whit the less of her for cherishing it.

Felicity often asked the old lady to dinner, pleading that she liked to "reminisce" with her about The Old Man—which was perfectly true—and on bad nights usually contrived to get Miss Walters to share her cab to and from the theatre without in any wise suggesting that benevolence prompted her.

Indeed, it had not been benevolence, or at least only faintly that. Felicity was kind, but she was not less self-absorbed than most accomplishees, and she did not always remember to do things because they ought to be done; the things she did were apt to be the things she wanted to do.

This winter was the first Aunt Elie had not been with her. The sturdiness with which that

All that Glitters Is Not Happiness

good woman had kept at her post was a marvel, but a serious valvular affection was growing on her so alarmingly that she had been persuaded to forswear the rigors of the road this season and stay quietly at Briarwood. Felicity, in her forlornness, had found Adelaide Walters the most satisfactory refuge among all her travelling companions and had been cheered and soothed a good many times by the old woman's kindly philosophy. It was in very real distress, then, that she responded to Miss Walters's call.

Room 1012 was on the top floor but one; only the servants slept higher. It was a mean little room, long and narrow, with a single window looking into a gray-bricked court. The last of the dreary daylight had not quite faded, and Miss Walters was lying in the gloom, dreading the turning on of the light, which hurt her eyes.

It was her habit, when she was well, to make a cheerful domicile for herself in a few moments, wherever she was set down. She had a little sewing-basket which, of itself, with its fat tomato pin-cushion and its flannel-leaved needle-book, its scissors and thimble and dried garden squash for darning over, was enough to make a place look home-like. But yesterday she had been too wretched, on arriving, to unpack anything but the barest necessities.

The bureau, with an ink-stained towel for scarf,

Felicity

bore the corrugated china match-safe which always represented, to Adelaide Walters, the essence of hotel dreariness—it seemed so inescapable. Beside it lay her “switch” and a litter of hair pins. On a chair were her travelling clothes, removed in great haste, for she could hardly wait to get her aching bones to bed; and on the floor by the chair were her shoes and stockings in a forlorn little huddle.

The whole scene smote most piteously on Felicity as she opened the door. Involuntarily, she dropped her black cloak and stood, a spot of vivid color in that gray waste. She wore a negligée of soft, lustrous silk that was delicate rose in the woof and silvery gray in the warp, and that seemed to shimmer with different tones and lights with every move she made. The gown was exceedingly voluminous and swirled about her in a glory of tender color, the “angel sleeves” falling away from her beautiful white arms.*

It was the artist in her that made her drop her cloak, instinctively, and lend her color-full presence to this dreary room. It was something finer than the artist sense that made her feel, a moment after, the blatant cruelty of her action. She had not been conscious of her youth and strength and success when she entered this dingy room where age and weakness and decayed powers lay prone in the last ditch, but the moment she was in, the cruelty of it all smote her and she felt terribly ill

All that Glitters Is Not Happiness

at ease. Her beauty and her brilliance seemed to her an affront to this aged distress, and she had a desire to be, for once, something better qualified than she was to minister to this woman who needed comfort so.

Miss Walters could give her but feeble greeting, and Felicity went over and sat down by her on the edge of the bed—partly that she might better hear the old woman's faint tones and partly in an impulse of mute comfort.

A withered, stringy brown arm lay uncovered on the white counterpane, and Felicity picked up the fevered hand and patted it.

"How are you feeling now?" she asked.

"Badly, dear, pretty badly. The doctor says I've pneumonia, though I'm still hoping he's mistaken."

Then her eyes travelled, for the first time since Felicity had entered the room, from the lovely face above the rosy gown and fell on the exquisite white hand patting her wrinkled, age-colored one, and she lifted her hand and laid it on Felicity's rounded, satiny white arm.

"I had arms like that, once," she said softly, and seemed more happy in the reminiscence than bitter over departed charms.

"Yes?" encouraged Felicity, realizing, somehow, what a tonic this recollection was, and delighted to help by her interest.

Felicity

"Yes, indeed. They were much celebrated in my day. It used to be quite a joke among my friends that an enthusiastic young reporter, out West, blossomed into verse, one day, with a poem in which he claimed the lost arms of the Venus of Milo were found, and that I had them. I had that clipping for years, but I've lost it. I wish I could show it to you."

"Oh, you don't need to show it to me," assured Felicity, "don't you suppose I know all about it?" More by her manner than by what she said she was stretching a very little truth to its utmost limits; but she was rewarded for her effort by the smile of gratification that overspread Miss Walters's age-lined countenance.

They fell to talking of The Old Man, then—or, rather, Felicity talked of him and the sick woman followed her with eager interest, interjecting a few words now and then as her strength allowed—and the bright talk of happy days was a better tonic than any doctor could have given.

"Now," said Felicity, as she got up to go, "this may be only a cold, as we hope, but I'm going to send you a nurse, because you must have some one to wait on you. And you're not to worry about your part; Miss Burton will manage very well, I'm sure." Then, with a sudden inspiration, she asked, "Is there any one you'd like me to send for? If it should turn out that you have a little



All that Glitters Is Not Happiness

pull ahead of you, it would be cheerier to have some 'own folks,' wouldn't it?"

She did not know much of Miss Walters's personal history and was quite unprepared for the haggard look which immediately came over the old woman's face.

"There's no one to send for," she said—the big, self-pitying tears beginning to roll slowly down her shrunken cheeks—"there's no one to send for! Ah, my dear, if I had it to do over again I'd live my life differently; I wouldn't come at last to this—alone, all alone. Don't you do it, dear. Give up something, give up everything, but have some one to belong to, some one whose place is with you when the world you're giving yourself to cannot and will not comfort you. I don't regret not having a husband. I guess I've seen too much of the world to think very highly of husbands. But, oh, my dear! I regret not having a child so passionately I can hardly bear to die—to die without having lived, it seems to me. . . . Now you must go, dear. You've a big night ahead of you, and you must go and make folks laugh. They've paid their money to see you, and you must send them away smiling. Try not to think of me to-night—try not to remember that none of those who smile with you would stand hand in hand with you on—on the dreaded brink. But some time when an opportunity comes to you to do better than

Felicity

I have done, think of me, and don't let your youth go and leave you alone—like me, alone!"

For answer, Felicity put her bright head on the pillow beside the gray one and wept, while the wrinkled hand patted her white, soft hand comfortingly.

"There! I'm a selfish old woman to put such desolation in your mind when you've your smiling work ahead of you and all the world's at your feet waiting to smile with you," she said, soothingly. "Forgive me, and dry your eyes. I'll lie here and reproach myself all night if you don't."

So Felicity made feint of being comforted, and gathering her black cloak around her hurried back to her rooms, where her dinner was waiting, all daintily set out on a small table before the blazing log fire.

Before sitting down to eat she despatched to "1012" a tall vase of Jacque roses and a big bunch of violets, and sent word to Mr. Leffler to have a trained nurse take charge of Miss Walters without delay. She wished she could move her out of that cheerless room without hurting her pride, but knew that to be impossible.

What dinner she managed to eat was got through with in a deep preoccupation.

"Bring one of those pink roses, Celeste," she said, when they were about to leave for the theatre. "I'll wear it in my hair in the first act."

All that Glitters Is Not Happiness

When she went on for the first act, the pink rose in her hair, the applause that greeted her amounted to a triumph. The theatre was packed, from orchestra pit to topmost gallery seat, but Felicity's eyes took in no more than the right-hand stage box where she saw, as she had hoped to see, a man's face light up with keen pleasure when he noticed the pink rose.

She was playing her dual rôle in *Marianna*, the play wherein she had won her greatest popular acclaim. It was founded on an old, old theme, which is ever fresh because it has its root in the wistfulness of each of us to be that we are not. Marianna was a gypsy girl, famed for her beauty and for her resemblance to the young queen of her country. Queen Marie had heard of Marianna; Marianna lived on the current stories of her queen. Marianna was tired of being a gypsy and eager to be a queen. Marie was very tired of being a queen and wistful to be gypsy-free. The exchange was effected—and Marianna, of course, fretted mightily under the restraints of queening, while Marie as soon tired of the gypsy freedom. The *noblesse oblige* that was, after all, paramount in the queen, sent her back to her responsibilities; the lawlessness that was, after all, paramount in Marianna, sent her back to her life without obligations. The incidental comedy was deliciously human, and the philosophy, trite as it was, was worked out with

Felicity

great charm. Felicity, alternating the rôles, was lovely—and behind all the efforts of queen and gypsy to be other than they really were, one glimpsed, always, that entrancing double consciousness of Felicity's wherewith she seemed ever to see herself as two persons, the two persons that are in all of us: the person we are and the person we would like to think ourselves. "One of me," Felicity was wont to say of herself, "is always watching 'the other of me' with a tender, smiling incredulity." Even so, as her Marie played at being Marianna, one felt the failure of the young queen's efforts to make her queenly self take serious account of her gypsyish efforts; and as her Marianna played at being Marie, one felt under the brave pretence the free girl's startled awe of queenly obligations. Altogether, it was the kind of pretty play into which one might read as deeply as his philosophy of life made possible, and which sent every auditor away with a sense of better satisfaction in the life he was living, whatever it might be, and yet kept sweet for him, in a sort of separate consciousness, those dreams he liked to cherish of a self he could never be.

"There's something uncommonly wistful, appealing, about her comedy to-night; don't you feel it?"

It was a minute, at least, after the curtain had

All that Glitters Is Not Happiness

gone down on the first act that Morton Allston shook himself out of his revery sufficiently to address this remark to his wife.

"I didn't notice anything unusual," said Sadie Allston, a little crisply. It would not have been in human nature for her to be other than jealous of her husband's enthusiasm in the triumphs of his one-time playmate.

"I wish The Old Man could see her to-night," he murmured, more to himself than to Sadie. But Sadie, absorbed in conversation with one of her guests, did not seem to hear.

Morton was glad he sat far back in the box where the shadows hid the tears in his eyes at the close of the last act. The others who watched Felicity had laughed with her and cried and laughed again, and as the final curtain dropped they were all smiling happily through their tears and breathing little, ecstatic sighs of wonder at the sweetness of her art and the completeness of her triumph. But somehow, the impression that stayed with Morton was one of pathos, deep pathos—not the pathos of the play, but the pathos of the player.

"There's something about her voice, her smile, the very way she uses her wonderful hands, that wrings my heart to-night," he mused. "I wish I knew if she were in any trouble."

"Isn't she exquisite!" cried one of his guests,

Felicity

as he helped her with her cloak. "How proud you must be of her."

"I am," he said, simply.

"Do you think you could take us back, Morton?" Sadie asked. "The girls are crazy to meet her."

"And the men," supplemented a masculine guest.

So they went back, and exchanged a few words with Felicity, who welcomed them with that shyness which all her rough schooling and all her brilliant success alike had failed to alter, and which was her chief charm to those who could appreciate it.

An effusive or evidently easy Felicity would have seemed a strange anomaly to her friends. Some called her little effect of diffidence, of withdrawal, the supremacy of art—the art of coquetry—and no one could deny that she was too perfect an artist in feeling to be unaware that it was the manner most pre-eminently fitting her personality. But also she was too perfect an artist in expression to seem conscious of her art, and whether she was shy by necessity or by selection, few ever came away from meeting her without saying:

"Wonderful! that shy, sweet manner in a woman of her triumphs."

Felicity knew they said it, and it pleased her. But she could not have been otherwise, in any

All that Glitters Is Not Happiness

event, for like many another celebrity who compels admiration from a distance, she was unconquerably timid with most people at close range.

"We'd love to have you take supper with us if you can, Miss Fergus," said Sadie, whose heart was set on giving her four guests the kind of time no one else in their acquaintance could give them—the kind of time they would talk about for many a day while they told their friends anecdotes of "when I had supper with Miss Fergus."

But Felicity shook her head, smiling. "I don't eat supper," she said; "only a glass of hot milk and a cracker, or something like that. Mrs. Allston never knew Aunt Elie, did she?" turning to Morton, "or she'd know I never learned to eat late suppers. I often wish I had learned; it looks so jolly," she went on, apologetically, "but I'm afraid I couldn't begin now without having to pay the piper exorbitantly the next day. And that's what we can't afford to do, you know. I've heard of comedians whose comedy was dyspepsia-proof—and comedians incline to dyspepsia, as the sparks fly upward—but I'm afraid mine wouldn't be."

At the supper-table in a gay café Morton told his guests about the performance of Mary Stuart that had inaugurated so much in Felicity's life, and about his first sight of her across the footlights, and the night in his college career when the six

Felicity

fellows had gone daft about her smile and she had worn in her hair the pink rose he sent her.

“And now, for old times’ sake, whenever she is playing in a town where I am, I send her a few pink roses ‘with the compliments of the killer,’ ” he said, “and always, if the part allows, she wears one in her hair.”

Meanwhile, in her room at the hotel, Felicity sat in the dark, by the embers of her wood fire, alone. She had dismissed Celeste as soon as she could, saying she would go to bed presently, when she felt like it. And then, in her white night-dress and down-wadded Japanese lounging-robe, her long braids of silken-fine hair hanging Marguerite-wise over her shoulders, she slipped from her chair to the warm hearthrug and sat there in a little, huddled heap, hugging her updrawn knees.

She was thinking of the Allston supper party—wondering if she would have had a good time if she had gone with them. But no! she doubted whether she could have enjoyed it. That was not what she yearned for, in these hours when—tense, still, with the effort of the evening, and wrought to her highest pitch—she returned to her rooms in need of a rest that was not there.

The room was heavy with the fragrance of flowers. The thunders of applause that had greeted

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her might have echoed in her ears, had she but listened. But she was not remembering her triumphs. She was remembering Adelaide Walters upstairs on her sick-bed; remembering the brown, stringy arms that had once been likened to the lost arms of the Venus of Milo; remembering the gray little room and the desolate huddle of clothing on the chair. There came back to her what Aunt Elie had often told her about the days when Cecile Fergus lay hovering on the borderland between two worlds, and a little, crimson circular she had worn hung on the hall-rack in the grim old house. Every time one of the three Ferguses passed the hall-rack the little circular brought a flood of feeling almost too piteous to be borne. But no one would imply the failure of hope by taking the crimson cloak down, and so it hung, agonizing them all, till Robert was gone, with his precious burden, to the Southland. Then, when the morning after the funeral came, and Amelia and her mother were face to face with the unutterably heart-breaking task of putting little Cecile's abandoned things tenderly away, Amelia had gone into the hall and found her mother standing by the hall-rack, her head buried in the folds of that gay little circular, her large form shaken with sobs.

That was sad, Felicity reflected, her eyes shining in the firelight, but that hastily discarded clothing on the chair upstairs was sadder, far sadder,

Felicity

because there was no one but herself, almost a stranger, whose heart ached at its piteousness.

Then she recalled, with what she would have said was a strange inconsequence, had she thought of it at all, how tenderly Morton had laid Sadie's cloak about her shoulders on the draughty stage, fastening it under her chin with no fumbling fingers, but the deftness of one used to such service.

And again she looked down at her satiny white arms encircling her knees, and tried to see them brown and stringy with age, like Adelaide Walters's. Strange! she had not thought of this before—had been too absorbed with her breathless climbing to think of what lay beyond the summit, far down on the other slope. One never thought of anything but the top until it was reached; then, immediately, before one had enjoyed it, one must think of the descent. Why, oh why, had she come this uncompanied way?

And, sobbing with the keenest sense she had yet known of the insufficiency of her triumphs to satisfy, she crept to bed.

CHAPTER XI

A MUMMER'S END

ADELAIDE WALTERS died on Friday, and Sunday they buried her in Graceland, where she had said she would as lief lie as anywhere. Her parents and kinsfolk lay far overseas in Germany, whence she had come in her young girlhood, and there was no burial spot in America that was sacred to her.

Felicity, who had watched with her to the end, holding her hand, followed her to the grave.

Saturday there was brought to her in her dressing-room at the theatre during the matinée a pencilled note:

"Awfully sorry to hear about Aunt Adelaide's death. Can I be of any service? I am playing at McVicker's.

"VINCENT DELANO."

She remembered, now, that Delano had for several seasons lately played in an important star company with Miss Walters, and like many of the younger men who played with her and benefited by her quiet little friendlinesses, had taken to call-

Felicity

ing her "Aunt Adelaide." So she scribbled him a return note:

"So glad to know you are in town. Yes, come to-morrow and help with the last tribute. Be at — — —'s undertaking rooms at two o'clock.
"F.F."

The next day, in the chapel of the undertaker, beside the casket of their fellow-player, she met Vincent Delano for the first time in several years. They had not played in the same company since that long, long ago time, a dozen years in fact, but an eternity in seeming, when she had left Morton's company at the close of the spring run in New York and Vincent had buoyed up her heavy heart with the promise of a weekly letter. For a fortnight before they parted she had made and re-made in her mind a question that should appear casual and not betray the terrible momentousness to her whether his letters were to begin at once or not until the long tour of exile began. But she had never mustered courage to ask. As a matter of fact, the letters began immediately, grew more and more intermittent through the short summer vacation, and lapsed entirely before the tour of exile was more than well under way. Vincent had meant to be faithful, when he made the promise; Vincent always meant to be faithful—at the moment of promising. But events conspired against him—there could be no other way of

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explaining it, they really did! He told Felicity so, next time he saw her, which was not for a couple of years. And he told it with such charming contrition—very real, too, at the moment—that she forgave him heartily, though she had never, to tell the truth, blamed him as she should, nor ever taken him down for one rebellious instant from his pedestal.

Their ways had not crossed much in the years that had made her unrivalled in her art and that were now threatening Vincent's supremacy as a *matinée* idol. But if younger men inclined to replace Vincent with the sweet sixteen of the day, no one had ever replaced him with Felicity. She no longer thought much about him, except at semi-occasional times when he recurred to her in some moment of sentimental need. But for the most part, her energy was absorbed by her art and she had almost forgotten the need of any other idol—forgotten what The Old Man had so often said to her about an artist being always a worshipper.

There was, therefore, little more consciousness in her manner when she greeted Vincent than any woman of eight-and-twenty is likely to feel in greeting the man she worshipped at sixteen. Felicity's sensibilities were too delicate for her to miss the tenderness of the reminiscence Vincent inspired—the tenderness of maturity for the momentous

Felicity

things of youth. She could never have been the artist she was if the sight of Vincent, or the thought of him, had given her only amusement, unmixed with wistfulness for the little girl who had been. And today she was doubly glad to see him, for she was feeling lonely, very lonely, and he was part of a yesterday that she loved and longed for; one of the few living links of her present with that vivid past dominated by The Old Man.

She asked Vincent to ride in her carriage to the cemetery, and in the long drive on the bleak, wintry day, they had opportunity for much talk with which they tried to bridge the gaps in their association.

Vincent was inclining to some girth at eight-and-thirty, and his hair was thinning. The thin hair was easily concealable, but not so the girth; if that got greater he would be in a bad way. But what was a man to do, when he had spent nearly forty years in eating what pleased him and drinking what was procurable and exercising when he could not help it, and sleeping when there was nothing better to do? A fellow could not begin asceticism at forty. Ah, yes! some had done it, but he was not their sort. "When I'm too fat to play Romeo, I'll be just right to play Falstaff—without padding, like Lemon and Hackett," said Vincent, comfortably.

But the threatening girth did not diminish his

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charm. If he had been as fat as that obese of swashbucklers, Vincent would still have been charming. Felicity felt the pleasureableness of that charm as he talked, as he readjusted the carriage rug about her when it had slid off, and even as he picked the driest place for her to stand when they got out.

The earth lay ankle-deep in slush which would soon freeze solid in the icy wind sweeping bleakly in from the lake and whipping the garments of the little group about them as they stood reverently by poor Adelaide Walters's grave. Felicity was crying when she re-entered her carriage and was driven away into the chill grayness, and when she looked up at Vincent, who had not broken the silence, she saw that his eyes were full of tears.

"I'm all stove in," he said frankly, unashamed of his emotion, as he wiped away the tears.

"I suppose that's a typical mummer's end," said Felicity, bitterly.

Vincent looked startled; he had not thought of that—did not want to think of it.

"Oh, I don't know," he said, cheerily, "anyway, let's hope not. Now, see here, little girl, you've cried enough this week, I'll bet. You can't help that poor soul any more, so what's the use of stewing yourself sick over her lonely death? Dry your eyes and come to dinner with your

Felicity

uncle, here, and see if I can't do something to draw out one of your 'justly celebrated smiles.' "

It was hard to realize how much of a stranger Vincent really was, the easy friendliness of his manner was as perfect as if he had been seeing her daily, all their lives; it lacked the least tinge of familiarity, but it had all the apparent forgetfulness of her fame for which her heart hungered then.

"He treats me like a human being," she thought, gratefully, "and not like a 'star.' He treats me just as if I were still little Felicity Fergus, the ingénue of *The Old Man's Company*." And her heart warmed to him.

It was five o'clock when they got back downtown, and they drove at once to Kinsley's, where Vincent picked a quietly-located table and got Felicity a glass of sherry to drive her nervous chill away, and with the least imaginable ado ordered a beautiful little dinner—an accomplishment in which his artistry was never disputed.

Felicity, who was never gorgeous, but who loved exquisite color and texture for stage and house wear, maintained a simplicity of attire for the street that seldom failed to cause comment; like her manner, it was "so unactressy." To-night she wore a close-fitting black gown, with the slightest tournure possible short of conspicuousness in a day when every woman's effort seemed to be to look

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more monstrous than her neighbors. Where the dead black met her creamy skin at throat and wrists there was a slender line of white lisse ruching. She had not a jewel about her, nor a trace of color, but Vincent, who was naturally rather splendid in his tastes, could not help chuckling delightedly to himself as he watched woman after woman sweep in, dressed, as he put it, "in all the finery the law allows," and noted how tawdry they looked beside the woman opposite him, with her masses of shining, braided hair, and sweetly serious face, where the famous smile played only so occasionally as to keep one watching for it fascinatedly, fearful lest a smile be lost.

"Got 'em all beat in a walk—she has!" he told himself, and grew quite absorbed—for Vincent—in wondering if she affected this simplicity with a fine art that conceals art, or if it was the inevitable outcropping of her Puritan blood—that Puritan blood which had always made her seem to Vincent so distinctly not his kind. As for Felicity, she herself was not sure whether her sombre attire in public was affected or not—and she enjoyed her own uncertainty. For she piqued her own interest, even as she piqued other people's, and was as often at a loss to understand herself as others were to understand her. The thing that made her an artist, though, was that she did not imagine this dual feeling peculiar to herself; she knew it to be

Felicity

a common human trait, and this knowledge was her power. The Old Man had seen to that. "Temperament," he had been wont to say, with his twinkling smile, "is human nature—only more so." Perhaps, Felicity told herself, she wore those plain clothes because she was really tired of gorgeousness; more probably, she thought, she wore them because they surprised people, and she had the same relish for doing that that a child has—"only more so."

They lingered over their dinner until nearly seven o'clock, and then drove back to the hotel. Vincent's company was playing that night, but Felicity, though she had had to forget, or to seem to forget, all about the Sabbath in her 'prentice years, never played on that day after she reached the time when she could dictate what she would and would not do; so her evening was free.

She wanted Vincent to get out of the cab as they passed McVicker's, and let her go the few blocks to her hotel alone; but he would not hear to it.

"I don't suppose you'd care to come in and see the play," he suggested, half deprecatingly. He had said he did not think much of it.

"No, thank you. You'll smile when I tell you that I promised Aunt Elie, long ago, when we just had to break every Sunday into smithereens, that when I got to where I could, I'd keep Sunday. That seemed to comfort her, a little, in what was

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really a very terrible trial to her, and I felt it was as little as I could do in return for all she sacrificed for me."

"Certainly," said Vincent, refraining from comment. But when he had seen her safely to her hotel and had paid her the last little attention his thoughtfulness could devise, he lighted a fresh cigarette and settled back in the cab with a feeling of amiable satisfaction that none of his forbears had handed down any Puritan scruples to him.

"She's easily the most exquisite thing I ever saw," he reflected, "but I'd hate like the deuce to have to live up to her."

When Felicity reached her rooms, she found that Morton Allston had been there, wanting to take her back home with him to spend a quiet evening. Of other callers there had been no lack, but she regretted missing none of them. It would have been a blessed relief, though, to sit down and talk to Morton of the things that filled her mind.

It was not yet eight o'clock, and there was a long, long evening to be got through, somehow; she had no hope of getting sleepy before midnight. People would call—plenty of them—but as she ran over the list of probabilities she could not think of one she wanted to see; could not bear the thought of ordinary "calling conversation" that night, with the memory of a desolate grave so heavily oppressing her. And there was no reason to expect

Felicity

that anything diverting and enlivening would eventuate from a strange quarter.

She wandered restlessly about her sitting-room for a while, now sitting down to the desk to write a letter, and in a moment pushing it impatiently away, scarce begun; now picking up a magazine and making an ineffectual effort to get interested in a story.

The log fire snapped and sparkled cosily; there was the usual profusion of freshly-cut flowers; the room invited one to comfort, but Felicity only fretted the more that there was no one there to make comfort for her by enjoying it with her. If only she could have drawn up two big chairs before that fire, and turned the lights low, and sat there, four-feet-on-a-fender fashion with somebody who had recollections common with hers, who dreamed her dreams! With The Old Man, first choice of all, though he was no "blood kin" of hers. But The Old Man was sleeping in Mt. Auburn, these six years, and had never seen her triumphs. With Aunt Elie, for second choice—or, no! not for second; that was wrong. Aunt Elie should always be first. The Old Man was the most charming human being she had ever known, the most adorable, but he had never sacrificed anything for her, and Aunt Elie had sacrificed everything. Sacrifice was not much the way of The Old Man, and it was not right to want him first because he was so infinitely

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delightful. No, no! Aunt Elie was first choice for that vacant chair, but Aunt Elie was eight hundred miles away, where the peach trees were blooming. She was lonesome, too, as Felicity was, and there was little likelihood that they could be much together again. Ah! this was a lonesome world.

With her genius for make-believe, Felicity even drew two chairs up to the fire and turned down the lights, trying to feel the presence of some one opposite who loved her and the things she loved; but to no avail. She almost wished she had gone to the theatre with Vincent, even to see a very mediocre play.

Celeste brought another card. Felicity looked at it, hesitated a moment, then, "Say Miss Fergus has been to Miss Walters's funeral and is very tired," she said, "and tell the boy to order a cab for me at once."

"Will madame change her dress?" asked Celeste, too perfectly trained to make comment or show surprise.

"No; I'll go just as I am. Please look in the address book on my desk and find Mr. Morton Allston's house number. I'm going out to make a call; I may come right back, I may spend the evening. You needn't wait for me. Do what you like, to-night."

"Thank you, madame," murmured Celeste,

Felicity

helping her into her little black jacket and fastening her furs.

Felicity felt a distinct sense of adventure and laughed at herself for so feeling.

"To get into a stuffy cab, all 'by lones,' as I used to say, and drive to the house of a quiet young couple to make an ordinary, humdrum Sunday-evening call, seems the height of excitement to me. And yet, I suppose there's hardly a woman in this town who doesn't think of my life as undoubtedly the most deliriously exciting one imaginable!"

She surprised Morton and his wife in the full abandon of domestic ease on a wretched, blustering Sunday evening, when the likelihood of callers was so small as to be no likelihood at all.

They had piled high the fire in their cosy sitting-room and lit the reading lamp. Morton, in lounging coat and slippers, was reading aloud, between puffs at his pipe, and Sadie, in a fussy, bridey-looking negligée, was curled up on a couch with a light rug thrown over her. On a small table, pushed out of the way, was a large tray, bespeaking a little "picnic tea" they had eaten in here after getting it themselves, on the servant's evening out.

Morton answered Felicity's ring, and was so surprised to see her he could scarcely believe his senses.

"Oh," she begged, when Sadie got up to bestir herself, asking if she had had tea, and Morton was

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inquiring if she had overshoes and ought she not to let him take them off, and would she not lay off her hat, "Oh, *please* don't bother about me, or let me break up your quiet evening! I was so lonesome I couldn't stand it another minute, and I thought maybe if I came out here and found you having a cosy, happy time, you'd let me slip in and share it without making any fuss about me. Somebody's always making a fuss about me," she finished, with a weary little gesture, "and I get so tired of it!"

No, she would not have any tea, she would not have anything. "If you'll just let me sit there," she said, indicating a low chair in the shadow, "and go on with your reading, and 'make out like I'm folks,' I'd far rather have it than—than an empire! Yes, for I'm sure I wouldn't take an empire for a gift," she laughed, "it would be such a nuisance!"

"I read in my paper this morning," Morton told her, "about Miss Walters's funeral, and I told Sadie I knew you'd be tired and sad, and I was going down to get you and bring you out to tea. I never dreamed of your going to Graceland this awful day; I didn't suppose you'd 'be let.' So I went down about the time I thought you'd be back from the service at the undertaker's."

"Oh, my manager protested, of course, and everybody told me it was too much for me to under-

Felicity

take, and all that; but I get balky, sometimes, and hate them all because I know they're considering the box office only, and don't care whether I live up to what seem to me my human obligations or not. My heart ached so over that poor, lonely old soul that I had to stay with her as long as I could, even though I knew it was forever past time for cheering her. I want some one to stay by me until the inexorable last minute, some day," she finished, with a quaver in her voice.

"When your time comes it'll be like The Old Man's," assured Morton; "thousands you never saw will cry to think your light and laughter have gone out of the world, and hundreds who loved you personally will crowd around your bier."

"Mercy!" cried Sadie, a little hysterically, "let's talk of something more cheerful! I'm blue enough as it is."

Felicity thought Morton's face, sharply defined in the strong reading light beside him, showed a faint trace of irritation, but he answered gently, as to a sick child:

"All right. You lie down again and I'll start another story."

But before he started it, he went over to her couch and shook up her pillow for her, and when she had settled herself on it he drew the rug up over her and arranged a chair-back to screen her eyes from the light.

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Felicity had never seen Morton in this rôle before, and the strangeness of it made her observe him closely. He hovered over her, too, for a moment, to make sure that she was comfortable, before going back to his chair by the lamp, refilling his pipe, and beginning a bright little story.

Felicity closed her eyes and laid her head back against the chair. She scarcely followed the story at all, her mind was so busy with other things, but she enjoyed the soothing sound of Morton's voice and she was grateful for the ban it put on conversation and for the opportunity it gave her to sit here, in this atmosphere of snug companionship, and think.

Morton had been married within the year. On the occasion of her last annual engagement in Chicago, he was on the eve of marriage and had brought Sadie as his fiancée to see Felicity play. After the last act they had "gone back," as on the other evening, to speak with her for a minute, and Sadie, inconcealably flustered at the meeting, had proposed a luncheon for Miss Fergus, which Felicity, who hated the functions of strangers, had declined, thereby putting Sadie a little at odds with her. Privately—though not too privately—Sadie considered Morton's celebrated friend "stuck-up and spoiled."

This was her first acquaintance with Felicity off the stage, and the pale, tired, lonely woman in the

Felicity

simple black dress was an anomaly to Sadie, who had no grasp of the complex, and struggled vainly to associate this Felicity with the comédienne whose smile was world-famous.

When Felicity's cab came, Morton apologized for not going to the hotel with her, but the servant had not come in and Sadie was afraid to stay in the house alone. He seemed troubled by the situation, but Felicity assured him she would not have allowed him to go in any case.

"Come and lunch with me some day, and let's talk about The Old Man, and the blessed old days," she said. Then, "Let me know, some time when Mrs. Allston is down town, and we'll arrange a little party."

Morton thanked her, and said he would speak to Sadie about it—was sure she would be delighted. Then he tucked the robe warmly about her knees, closed the carriage door, and stood an instant on the horse-block, in the sleety wind, waving her good-by.

"Dear old Morton!" mused Felicity, "it seems so good to be with him. But oh! how did he ever come to marry that little nonentity? And how can I hope ever to enjoy him in her depressing presence?"

CHAPTER XII

SOME QUESTIONS THAT WERE NEVER ANSWERED

IN April, Felicity settled in New York for a long run that would last well on into the warm weather; and as soon as she was comfortably fixed, Aunt Elie came up from Briarwood to be with her until the Fall. After the season closed they would go somewhere and take a cottage by the sea, and play at keeping house. "We'll make toast for our own tea, by the grate-fire, on chill evenings," Felicity said, planning; that seemed delightfully domestic to her, and she looked forward to it with eager pleasure. She was tired of Europe, she said, and would not have gone even if Aunt Elie's strength had permitted.

In her dressing-room at the theatre, one evening late in April, a card was brought her.

"Do you know," it said, "that this is the first time I've ever seen you act? May I go back and tell you how perfectly bully you are?"

"V. D."

She sent word to him to come after the next act, when she had no change of costume to make and was not required on the stage until the third act was well under way.

Felicity

Vincent was looking wonderfully handsome, in his immaculate evening dress—not showing anything of the commonplaceness of hastened middle-age which already he had begun to show, at times, in his street clothes and under garish daylight. And he was frankly enthusiastic about Felicity's acting, though he had not yet watched her strong scene in the third act, which the critics called the most charming bit of comedy the present generation had ever witnessed.

"Our show went broke in Des Moines," he explained, "about a month after I saw you in Chicago. Business kept getting thinner and thinner and finally it was decided to 'withdraw' the play and cancel engagements. I stopped in Chicago on my way east, because I'd heard of a piece that was to be put on there for a summer run, in which I might get something. But there was nothing doing for me, and I knew pretty blessedly well there wouldn't be anything in New York at this time o' year, so I just loafed around in Chicago—got a lot of awfully jolly friends there—and had a ripping time. I hit little old New York Sunday, and the first chance I got I posted over here to see you. Haven't ever seen you before, you know. This is the first time I've been out of an engagement since—well, since I went into The Old Man's company in the fall of '75, nearly fourteen years ago."

Felicity wondered if he minded this first break

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in his continued success as a *matinée* idol; wondered if he dreaded the encroachment of age that promised little enough for a man who had never been more than an acceptable support, save for the ability of his debonair personality to draw large houses of worshipping women and girls.

But Vincent, though Felicity wondered in vain about him, did not mind; he was not of the kind that gives much thought to the morrow, nor yet of the kind that inquires too closely into the causes of success and separates the success of youth and beauty from the success of art. Other men in his profession were no more than launched upon their careers at forty, and Vincent never doubted that the future would always hold a "part" for him and that the world would always treat him well. Felicity, who paid the inevitable price an artist pays and was never able to satisfy herself, never so lauded as to have her foreboding silenced, never so triumphant as to lose the chill apprehension of a day when triumphs would cease to be, need not have worried about Vincent, who never worried about anything.

"When may I come and see you and have a real talk?" he asked her, as her call came and he rose to go back to his seat.

"Come to luncheon at one on—let me see—Friday? That'll be delightful. Aunt Elie'll be so glad to see you."

Felicity

"And you?"

"I thought that went without saying," she said, smiling, as she held out her hand. "We're at the Sandringham. Good-night; it was so good of you to come and see me." And she hurried away.

Watching her in her great scene in the third act of *'Toinette La Fontaine*, Vincent could hardly believe it was the woman he knew—the quiet, shy woman he had always thought was Felicity Fergus—who rose to those heights of teasing, bewitching comedy, more delicious comedy than he had ever dreamed could be acted on a stage. No wonder the world went mad about her, he mused. And when he went out into Broadway, for the first time in his life the spell of what he had left behind went with him, and the glare and gayety he loved so well had no power to eradicate that strange, new fascination.

That night he dreamed of Felicity, dreamed that she was beckoning him with her wonderful smile, but that he could not seem to follow her and she faded away into the unreachable distance and left him alone. It was a curious dream for Vincent, who was not very imaginative.

On Friday, at luncheon, he found himself absorbed in the effort to arouse in Felicity a replica of that comedy which had so charmed him across the footlights. He told story after story of his mirthful experiences, which Felicity matched with

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the tales of her own, until they were all three in a state of merriment. It was like old times, Felicity said, wiping her eyes and breathing exhaustedly. Once in a while—when he found himself with people of the right sort, people who knew this good was occasional instead of imagining it was ironic—The Old Man had given himself up whole-heartedly to hilarity and made every one around laugh until he could laugh no more. Had Vincent ever heard him so? Yes—two or three times. And wasn't it something to remember? Yes, indeed it was. It was good to laugh so, once in a while. But on the whole, Felicity thought she preferred The Old Man's chuckling moods to any except his very serious moods, which were the most wonderful of all. Vincent had never known him in the latter? Ah, that was too bad! But he recalled himself so only to a very few.

"But you knew him well in his waggish moods?"

"Yes, I should say I did!"

And there followed tale on tale of Phineas, who, travelling, had delighted in giving harrowing accounts of this and that member of his company to credulous and interested strangers. Once, on a long, tiresome journey, he had immensely entertained himself by telling a good soul with whom he got into conversation, and who looked as if she might be the president of a foreign missionary

Felicity

society going to visit a married daughter, that Miss Fessenden was. "an escaped nun"; encouraged by the good soul's gaping interest, he amplified the story, dwelt on details, suggested that Miss Fessenden, properly approached, liked to talk of her horrible experiences and could tell hair-raising stories. He hardly dared to hope the good soul would approach Miss Fessenden; he would have been sufficiently rewarded in the enjoyment he had in his own fictional powers, and in the play of emotions on the good soul's countenance, testifying to his powers as a story-teller; but she did venture to get first-hand information, with results that gave Phineas much joy. Incidentally, he had remarked that Miss Fessenden knew the Catholics were preparing another massacre like St. Bartholomew, and the good soul, who had said she was a Methodist, asked Miss Fessenden if this were true. Vincent could never forget Miss Fessenden's fury; he laughed till he cried, every time he thought of it.

"It was a great hobby of his, to what lengths bigotry would lead people even in these days," Felicity observed; "he was always trying such things in jest and thinking them over in earnest.

"I remember one day when I was with him in Boston," she went on, "and we stopped in front of one of the newspaper offices on Washington Street, to watch a young man write bulletins of the latest news, on a big blackboard on the front of the

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building. 'Cholera,' wrote the young man, standing on a step-ladder to reach, 'is raging in Vienna.' With an intent interest The Old Man observed to me, in a quite-audible undertone, 'He spells "raging" with one g.' The young man turned around, annoyed; there was a little group of bystanders, all of whom looked puzzled. 'One g's right,' said the young man, belligerently. The Old Man's face was a study in inscrutability. 'I didn't say it wasn't,' he remarked; 'I simply told my little girl, here, that you did it with one g.' Somebody in the little crowd tittered. 'Oh, well!' snarled the young man, impatiently, and rubbed it out and rewrote it with two g's. Then The Old Man and I solemnly and silently stole away and looked for a place to laugh. But he often recurred to that episode as an illustration of how easily people are discouraged, and, more particularly, of how little positiveness most of us have about our knowledge."

Felicity's story-telling was exquisite; its mimicry perfect, its understanding of human nature both keen and kind. With her training, added to her natural bent, everything in life was a story to her, every day's experience was an unwritten book of the *Comédie Humaine*. Vincent was entranced. He had never known Felicity like this before, and he was quite excited over his discovery. Her old charm was new to Vincent, for all the years he had

Felicity

known her, and though he did not analyze it to find its essence, he felt the full flavor of its unexpectedness.

That night he was at the theatre to see her again, feeling rather foolish about it, but unable to keep away. And at the close of the third act he sent back a box of white hyacinths and violets, with a card:

“Just had to see it all over again; find it more wonderful than before. “V.”

Felicity, as she buried her face in the cool, sweet flowers, seemed to see the little girl of long ago; to feel the thrill that little girl felt when a tall hero told her to “brace up” and he’d help her all he could; to tremble again with the wonderful feeling of her arms about that hero’s neck. And when she lifted her face from the flowers it was flushed with the memory of a sweet consciousness that had gone out of her life in the struggle, long ago, and had never been replaced—no, not in all her triumphs—by anything half so delicious.

That night, when she returned to her rooms at the hotel, Aunt Elie was asleep, as usual, and everything was very quiet. After Celeste had brushed Felicity’s hair and put away her clothes and done the other little services of the bedtime hour, Felicity dismissed her and, wrapping a dressing-gown around her, sat down again, as on that night in

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Chicago, before the log fire which the chill spring night required for comfort.

There she sat, a long time, on the warm hearth-rug, pondering. She wished Aunt Elie were awake; she wanted to ask her some questions. But Aunt Elie was poorly, very poorly, and it would be sheer cruelty to wake her. No! the morning would not do as well—not nearly. There are some things one asks and tells over the midnight embers that one would never, never mention over the breakfast table.

Felicity's days were very full; not ideally so, by any means, but even the frets and the onerous obligations were of a kind she could fight through by herself pretty well. It was the quiet times—the nights, after the lights were out and the plaudits of the theatre were gone from her ears; the Sundays; the hours when she ceased, as it were, to be a busy actress, and was only a woman—that she was lonely. All the times when the superficialities of her life were laid aside and the real issues crowded upon her, in those times she was without companionship.

She wondered if women ever found any satisfaction in lives lived alone. What Adelaide Walters most passionately regretted on that pathetic deathbed was not the mate but the child she had never had. Felicity had never thought much about motherhood for herself, save as she thought wist-

Felicity

fully, at times, of all that appertained to the common lot and that seemed denied her; what she longed for most was companionship. Perhaps in old age, when one had ceased to believe in the possibility of companionship, one cried out in bitter regret for the child that had never been. Yes, there must be a time when women cease hoping for one who shall give them all, and find their happiness in one to whom they can give all. It was piteous to be defrauded of both delights. She wondered if women who were not mothers always felt as Adelaide Walters felt, when life was done. Amelia, with the reticence of her race, had never been communicative on such subjects as this, and Felicity, hitherto, had not been sharply moved to question her.

Restless, wide-eyed, wondering, she got up and went into Amelia's room, with a vague, unconfessed idea of waking her and putting these torturing questions to her. Perhaps she would not do that; perhaps she would only get beneath the covers with Aunt Elie and feel the warmth of her presence and not try to speak;—anything but the cold silence of that room of hers, empty of love and of the least evidence of human companionship.

To Felicity in this mood, her silent, orderly, luxurious room was abhorrent, so she went into Amelia's, drawn thither by a feeling that it would

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be a comfort to be there, even if she did not speak. Perhaps Aunt Elie would stir and ask her, sleepily, what she wanted. But Aunt Elie did not. Then, impelled by a wistfulness greater than her sense of obligation to a sick old woman's rest, she put out her hand in the dark and touched Amelia; she was cold, quite cold. With a low moan of utter desolation, Felicity fell forward, prostrate, over the uncomprehending form.

Felicity's first thought, when she rallied from the shock sufficiently to think, was that those questions she had come to ask must forever be unanswered, now. She would never know what Amelia had missed out of life; what she had found, in all despite, worth while.

She had no disposition, at first, to call any aid or make any outcry; it seemed enough to sit there by Aunt Elie sleeping, and try to realize what life would be without her. She was conscious of a shrinking from the excitement that would ensue, of a wish that since Amelia was gone, she might carry the deserted tabernacle away, stealthily, and hide it and her grief alike from curious eyes. The thought of the ordinary panoply of death was inexpressibly harrowing to her. There was no one who really cared—no one but herself. Why should she have to let all the world into her confidence? She hated the thought of facing audiences acquainted with her grief; hated the thought of being watched,

Felicity

on and off the stage, by alien eyes, looking to see how she bore it.

In this spirit of rebellion against intrusion, this perfect abandonment to her sense of loneliness, she kept her vigil by Amelia till the early dawn was breaking. Then, chilled into rigidity, she waked Celeste, very quietly, and went about the business of summoning a physician and notifying the hotel people. When that was done, she shut herself in her room and refused to see any one but Mr. Lefler, who at once assumed full charge of everything.

But after the undertakers had gone, she took Vincent's white hyacinths and violets from the vase where Celeste had put them last night, and laid them in one waxen hand, and after that she sat by the still, sheeted figure the interminable day through, while hushed voices dictated a multitude of affairs in her sitting-room.

About six o'clock Vincent called. He had read in the evening papers that owing to the death of Miss Fergus's only near relative, the theatre would be closed. There had been no matinée and would be no evening performance, but Monday night Miss Fergus would appear.

Felicity had thought of Vincent more than once during her vigil and several times had been on the point of sending for him as the one person in New York likely to be of comfort to her. But it seemed to suit her better to wait and see if Vincent would

Questions Never Answered

come to her. He did, very promptly on hearing of her sorrow, for no heart could be tenderer than Vincent's, no kindness quicker to act. He hated pain and the sight of suffering, and always avoided them if, in his favorite phrase, he "decently" could; but this was one of the times when he could not, and with that quickness to act when necessity demanded, which was part of his impulsive temperament, Vincent hastened to Felicity, feeling sure, somehow, that she would expect him, and tenderly elated at the thought.

Felicity had given orders that he be admitted, and he was shown at once up to her sitting-room, where, amid a good deal of confusion incident to getting off on the midnight train for Boston, he found her. There was not much he could say, there in that strange, subdued bustle, and he was distinctly ill at ease, until, when he had asked Lefler if he could be of any service, that harried young man said, "Yes," fervently, "see if you can't get her out of this and make her eat something somewhere. I can't budge her, and you can imagine what she'll eat if I order dinner for her here. If you could take care of her till train time you'd lift a load off my mind."

Felicity demurred at first. "I can't go anywhere," she said, fretfully, "everywhere I go, people stare at me."

"No, they won't," Vincent assured her, cheerily.

Felicity

"I'll take you to some little old place where nobody'll know you from a hole in the wall, and get you a bottle of good Chianti and some Italian stuff to eat. You've got to eat, you know," he charged, more gravely, "you've a hard journey ahead of you—two nights on a sleeper, and then, Monday night, back to work again. Come!"

She went, hidden behind a thick black chiffon veil—glad to be taken charge of, glad to do as she was bidden.

Vincent put her in a cab and gave an address far downtown, south of Fourteenth Street and away from the bohemian haunts of University Place and its vicinity. Then he got in beside her and dropped both the windows so the sweet spring air might blow in refreshingly.

Fifth Avenue was crowded as they threaded their way down through the maze of vehicles, and for a while neither of them spoke, but both seemed absorbed in watching the passing show. Presently a little stifled sob escaped her.

"What is it?" he asked, with awkward gentleness.

For a moment she did not reply, then he repeated his query.

"So many people," she said, brokenly, "so many people, and no one belongs to me."

"Oh, you've got any amount of friends," reminded Vincent, "and worshippers—why, all these



For a woman in her position! Why, the world was hers.

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people are your worshippers. You've got everything in the world a woman could possibly want—fame and beauty and money and charm—everything but a lot of relatives—which most people that've got 'em don't want—and you can always get those, you know!"

"No, you can't; not the kind that really care. There's nothing in this world so hard to get and keep as some one that really cares for you. Aunt Elie gave up everything for my sake, and there'll never be any one who'll do a hundredth part as much for me. It isn't that I want any one to do things for me," she explained, smiling a little at herself, "but just that I want to know they would if I needed them."

Vincent felt that this was a subtlety too fine for him, so he said nothing. His attitude toward the world was essentially simple and comprehended a liking for nearly every one who treated him pleasantly and a mild dislike of those who did not. If some he had liked went over to the other class in his scheme of things, why, there were always recruits eligible for the vacant places. He could not comprehend Felicity's woe, but he was sorry she felt any. In a world so full of possible pleasantness, it was a pity to have any kind of woe if one could help it. And for a woman in her position! Why, the world was hers; there wasn't anything she could not have if she wanted it.



Felicity

He set himself to the beguiling of her, and so far succeeded that he got her to eat a very good dinner—the first food she had tasted that day.

If any one in the little Italian restaurant recognized either of them, no one paid them any noticeable attention, and reassured by this and physically revived by the food and wine, Felicity showed an encouraging appreciation of Vincent's efforts.

It was past time for the theatre crowds when they left the little restaurant, and Vincent directed the cabman to drive straight up Fifth Avenue and avoid the Broadway district.

As they neared the Sandringham, Felicity began to feel the pang of parting from him, to wish that it might be possible for him to be with her to-morrow in Millville. But there was no plausible reason for this. With so many to do for her, it would be ridiculous to ask Vincent to go. Indeed, it would not do at all, she knew—and chafed against the little conventions that made it impossible for the one friend she found comforting to stand by her at Amelia's grave without causing comment.

"You've been very good to me," she said, when their drive was almost over; "it seems you're always being good to me. All my recollections of you are of your kindness to me when I was distressed."

"Oh, pshaw!" said Vincent, "I've done nothing—I wish I had!"

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She had not put on her gloves again, and he found her hand, in the dark, and raised it to his lips. And as she felt the touch of his reverent caress there came to her an almost uncontrollable impulse to lay her head down on him and feel his arms enfold her as on that night so long, long ago, the memory of which still stirred her sweetly. But they were within a block of the hotel, and with that curious sense of convention which robs the majority of us of all abandon, she reflected that in a moment the hotel footman would be opening the carriage door; so she merely pressed the hand that held hers, lightly, and made ready to step out as soon as the cab stopped.

"Don't trouble to come up," she said, "there's nothing you can do, and we'll start for the train in a little while."

"May I look in, Monday, for a few minutes?"

"Yes, do, please. Good-night."

Vincent paid and dismissed the cabman, and sauntered over in the direction of Broadway, lighting a cigarette as he started. The glare of the Rialto was his panacea for all kinds of blues, but to-night he seemed to have a fit of abstraction the familiar seductions could not dissipate.

CHAPTER XIII

“NOT WILLING TO BE FELT SORRY FOR”

FRANCES ALLSTON learned early of the death of Amelia and the coming of the little funeral party to lay her beside her father and mother, and telegraphed Felicity an offer of her hospitality, which Felicity accepted, gratefully. “Services from here if you wish,” the message said, and so Amelia’s body was taken to Federal Street, past the old stone house she had left twenty years ago, and laid in Mrs. Allston’s parlor.

Felicity wished it might have lain at last in the parlor where the “Covenanters” had looked down from the wall on other familiar landmarks of Amelia’s youth and maturity; she knew that, brave as her Aunt Elie always was about the lot she had chosen, nothing could have given her—poor, travel-tossed soul—more pleasure than to know that she would lie in the old stone house once more, in the grim parlor where her father and Cecile and Jane herself had lain. But, this being impossible, Felicity was glad indeed that they could go to Frances Allston’s.

Standing on the porch of that home where she

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had spent so many entranced hours with The Old Man, she remembered a hundred comforting things he had told her—just as he knew she would—and any bitterness of regret she might have felt in Amelia's behalf faded as she reflected how he would have said, “The luck o' the road, my dear, the luck o' the road. You can't cultivate still gardens and know the zest of the march at the same time. It isn't honorable to regret your choice; the only honor is to make the best of it.”

They laid Amelia away in the early afternoon, and afterwards Felicity returned to the Allstons' for a rest and visit before leaving on the 6:30 train for Boston. Adams was in business with his father and living at home, and she enjoyed talking with him of the old days. She told them all of her evening in Morton's home, and when she and Frances Allston were alone, that motherly woman whispered to her a secret about Morton's hopes.

It was train time in an incredibly short space, and Felicity was gone, regretfully, from Millville. After she left, Frances sat alone in the twilight on her little side porch overlooking the old stone house, and thought of many things, tending chiefly to the same eager question. The little girl she and her father had talked about, that long ago day after the show in the barn, was now an exquisitely beautiful and wonderfully gifted woman, to



Felicity

whom art and beauty had brought all the rewards the world can give a woman. And yet there was nothing triumphant about Felicity; rather, she seemed to incarnate a deep, unspeakable wistfulness. Frances wondered. She knew the artist type too well to jump ignorantly as the unknowing world does to the conclusion that Felicity must have had great personal sorrow to make her so pensively inclined. She knew that the very same supersensitiveness which made her so keen to feel the comedy of life made her equally keen to feel its tragedy, and that a temperament so finely pitched may be harassed to frenzy by things another temperament would not notice, worn out by sympathies another temperament would not feel. She remembered her father illustrating this for her, once in her girlhood, by breathing on a surface of highly polished silver and then on a surface of unpolished wood. "The lightest breath stains bright surfaces," he said, "the tiniest clouds reflect in sunny pools." Still, she wondered. He had taught her to wonder deeply about everything; to feel constantly that alert curiosity that gives life its zest.

Monday night in her dressing-room before the first act, Felicity fought the hardest fight of her life thus far. She thought she had learned to stifle all her own feelings and "go on game," as

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The Old Man used to say, whatever happened. But to-night she had a shrinking from the audience she could hardly overcome. While she was wrestling with it there came a telegram from Morton in Chicago:

"Thinking of you. Please accept roses as expression of sympathy."

Before her call came, the pink roses he had wired for arrived, and gave her, somehow, the courage she had needed. She had longed for The Old Man to-night as never before in all her need of him, and the familiar pink roses, the message from Morton, seemed a wonderfully sweet substitute for Phineas himself and all that he stood for in her mind.

There was no mistaking the temper of the audience that night. Felicity was, perhaps, as little conscious of her audience, generally, as an artist could be, but she always felt its temper as any mercurial thing feels fine gradations of heat or cold, and to-night she was instantly conscious of the attitude that bespoke acquaintance with her grief and wonder whether she would be able to win laughs in spite of it.

To one who so long had been envied, pity was a new sensation and one she resented. The Old Man would have shaken his head to think how far she had yet to travel before she was a real *comédienne*,

Felicity

worthy of the great company that has given the world its sweetest smiles.

"Not willing to be laughed at?" he was wont to say, "and yet keen to laugh at others! Not willing to be felt sorry for? and yet proud to call yourself sympathetic! Such snobbery! Such aloofness!"

Felicity had heard him say this a score of times, but no recollection of it came to her, as it would, later. Instead, something flashed over the foot-lights from her to her audience that seemed to say, "Keep your sympathy to yourselves; I want none of it. And your laughter I can get, for that's my business and I am equal to it."

She was equal to it, but after she had sent her audience home smiling, it was a woman with a strange new hardness in her heart who left the theatre and was driven back to that silent suite of rooms where Amelia's bed stood empty and her favorite rocking chair in the sitting-room was as eloquent as the riderless horse in a hero-general's "last parade."

Mr. Leffler had tried to persuade Felicity not to return to the Sandringham, but to go to some hotel where she would be less reminded of Amelia, but Felicity refused, with some show of obstinacy, on the ground that after she left these rooms she would never again have an abiding-place that reminded her of Amelia—except Briarwood, where

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she could not hope to be very much—and so she would cling to this one as long as possible. In the summer she would go abroad, instead of trying the seashore cottage alone or with a hired companion.

She had thought a good deal about the possibilities of a companion. Somewhere in the wide, wide world, it would seem, there must be a companionable soul who would be willing, if not glad, to live and travel with Felicity Fergus. But was there one Felicity would be glad to have? She could not think of one among the women she knew, except Frances Allston; and Frances Allston was bound by other ties. Probably everybody worth having was bound by other ties; unattached folks were pretty apt to be folks nobody wanted, not even others who were equally unattached. It was a hard world for a lone woman, she reflected, as she crept into her bed and lay there, thinking. The plaudits of the theatre seemed worlds away, and, aching with self-pity she recalled the lines in *Aurora Leigh*, her favorite poem:

“How dreary ’tis for women to sit still
On winter nights by solitary fires,
And hear the nations praising them far off.”

And in a passion of loneliness she cried herself to sleep.

Felicity

Vincent had meant to call Monday, but he forgot. Sunday, he had chanced upon an old friend in New York for a short stay, and together they had started in to enjoy the sights. The way Vincent happened to remember about Felicity was: while he and the friend were at Niblo's Monday night, seeing Mrs. Potter and Bellew, the friend remarked, "I see Felicity Fergus is playing here. I want to see her."

"Gee whiz!" said Vincent.

"What's the matter?"

"Miss Fergus is an old friend o' mine—we played together years ago—and last Friday night her aunt died. The old lady was her only relative, and Miss Fergus was terribly cut up. The funeral was yesterday, in Massachusetts, and the poor girl's playing again to-night. I promised to call on her to-day to cheer her up, and I clean, plum forgot it. I always forget things! Seems as if I can never think of but one thing at a time, and today it was you. But we'll see her to-morrow night, and if she'll let me, I'll take you back to meet her."

Vincent meant to get around to the Sandringham Tuesday afternoon, but somehow he did not manage it. After the first act that night, though, he sent her a card asking if he might take a friend back.

Felicity was no little hurt by her failure to hear

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anything of Vincent these two days, but she sent word that he might come, and received him and his friend with her usual shy gentleness and sent the friend away with the usual wonder about her charm.

"You wouldn't think, to talk with her, that she was the woman to make thousands laugh and cry, would you?" commented the friend, when they were back in their seats again.

"No," said Vincent, "not meeting her that way you wouldn't. But you ought to see her when she's worked up to one of her comedy moods in conversation. People of her sort are all moods, you know: sometimes 'way up, and sometimes 'way down—and much o' the time so tired out with the last mood that they haven't any mood at all. But it's worth waiting for, to see her in one of her entrancing moods."

"Lively, then, eh?"

"Well, no; I wouldn't call it lively—not even vivacious, I guess. But it's something I'll bet you never saw the like of in your life. I'll never forget her last Friday at luncheon. Seems as if, if I knew her a thousand years, I'd always be watching for that mood to come 'round again. But you can't coax her into 'em; they just happen, or they don't—that's all."

"Kind o' capricious lady?"

"No; it isn't caprice. Goshen, no! she wouldn't



Felicity

condescend to caprice, and you couldn't get so interested in her if you thought she was coquetting with you like the rank and file o' women folks. It's—well, I don't know what it is, but it's the essence of fascination, as near as I can make out."

"Every man who sees her is crazy about her, I suppose?"

"Never heard of any that was—on the contrary. She isn't at all the sort men go crazy about, except at a distance. She's too stand-offish for many to get acquainted with, and when you do know her, she piques your interest, but that's all. I don't know what it is about her, unless it's her Puritan blood, but she isn't a bit of a siren. I guess if I was a word-splitter I'd say she appeals to your mind but not to your senses—something like that. Anyway, she gives an ordinary, everyday sort of human man the impression that she'd be terribly uncomfortable to live up to—and you know how men like that! A little of it goes a long way."

"Well, I declare!" exclaimed the friend, who had never dreamed of a possible woman a man might find infinitely fascinating and yet not desirable. "Couldn't you ask her to go to supper with us?"

"She never goes to supper; but I could ask her to lunch. I don't know that she'd come, but I could ask; she might."

And he did ask—feeling a little mean about

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it, however, because it did not seem that his friend could be in the least degree interesting to Felicity and it was a shame to ask her just to show his rich and lion-loving friend that he could. Vincent was nearly “strapped,” as he called it, and the friend was in New York to have a big time, as big as could be bought by his abundance. He had wine and dined chorus girls and comic opera singers without number, but he had never been nearer than across the footlights to a woman of Felicity’s talent and distinction and he was willing to pay well for the privilege of saying: “At a little lunch I gave Miss Fergus, the other day”—willing to pay Vincent, not in coin, which would have been intolerable, but in dinners and suppers and lunches and drives throughout his stay in New York. As well as if they had actually bargained to this effect, Vincent knew it was so, and had misgivings as to whether it was quite “the decent thing to do.” But, pshaw! The fellow was all right, and who knew? Felicity might find him unexpectedly worth while from some of her many points of view. So he asked her, and to his surprise, she accepted.

His friend, elated by the unusualness of getting Miss Fergus to lunch, wanted to ask other people and make a function of it, but Vincent restrained him.

“She’s in deep sorrow,” he said, “and not ac-

Felicity

cepting any social courtesies. And besides, if you want to show her off to your friends, you'd better take 'em to the theatre; she's sure to be charming there, and the chances of her appearing to advantage at a table full of strangers are not worth that," and Vincent snapped his fingers.

So they lunched together at Delmonico's in the most casual manner Vincent could persuade his friend into. "The minute you begin to order a world of stuff and make a fuss about it, you bore her," he explained. The friend was incredulous, but obedient.

Vincent was surprised at Felicity that day, and never knew what made her so charming. How could he know that when she felt a hundred recognizing eyes upon her in her black dress, she determined that not one of those curious eyes should see into the loneliness of her heart? The defiant mood was still dominant. Her grief was her own and the world should not take account of it. In this spirit of bravado she had accepted the invitation, and in this spirit she exercised all her art to make the occasion memorable. She had few interests in common with Vincent's friend, but he was frankly fascinated with the theatre and everything that appertained to its life and its people, and when she found that her reminiscences and Vincent's delighted their host inexpressibly, she launched into anecdote in a way in which she was inimitable.

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"You see the funny side of everything, don't you?" said her host, wiping his eyes, after laughing until he cried.

As if rebuked by this intended compliment, Felicity answered quickly, "I have to; I feel the sad side so deeply that if I didn't see the funny side too, I'd die."

Her host looked baffled, and Felicity, after that one outburst, saw the impossibility of making him understand, and soon rose to go.

"My! but that was like her," said Vincent, when they had driven her where she desired to be left to keep an appointment. "Gives you a curious feeling, doesn't it, to have her slip up on you that way? You think you're travelling neck and neck with her, matched to a point, and the next thing you know she's a lap ahead of you and running like the wind. Nothing for you to do but slacken down and call the race off. I can't get used to it."

It was no wonder poor Vincent was bewildered. But if Felicity's art made her a more successful experimenter with moods than the ordinary woman, it was a difference only of degree; there was a sheer femininity about her, after all, that would have been delicious, if one could have understood that it was the woman and not the "star" who acted. But it was her penalty that people were always trying to find her ordinariness extraordinary.

CHAPTER XIV

IN WHICH "STARRING," IT SEEMS, IS LONESOME
BUSINESS

WHEN the warm, bright May days were established and the fitfulness of April was left behind, Felicity became possessed of a great yearning for the country, and when she could shake herself free of professional engagements during the day, would take a train up to the neighborhood of University Heights or cross on the Weehawken ferry to the Jersey shore and plunge into the freshly-green woods of the palisades. But hers was not the spirit that could be happy unaccompanied in the country; she wanted some one by her, enjoying things as she enjoyed them, hearing the same bird sing, in Stevenson's phrase, entranced and transfigured in the same way as she. The Old Man had taught her the intoxicating sweetness of such companionship, and the deep draughts she had drunk of it at his hand had left her with a craving for more, always for more.

There was a girl in her company, a slip of a young thing named Arline Prentiss, who played very much such ingénue rôles as Felicity herself

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had played a dozen years ago, in whom Felicity felt a considerable interest. She encountered little Miss Prentiss one warm evening as she was entering the theatre, and the girl held out to Felicity a bunch of sweet, single violets she had just bought from a street flower-seller.

"Smell my springtime," said Arline, shyly, holding out her little bouquet. "I just had to have something 'spring-y,'" she went on, as Felicity buried her nose in the fragrant, wet violets, "it seems stifling to come in out of all that freshness to the close, musty theatre, doesn't it?"

Felicity had never heard the girl express herself in this wise before, and a touch of wistfulness in Arline's manner arrested her star's attention more effectually than anything else could have done. The child must be lonely, too, she thought—stage life was so hard for a girl like that. Stopping outside her dressing-room door she handed back the violets and, moved by a sudden impulse, said:

"Don't you want to come to the country with me to-morrow? Come to my hotel at ten, and we'll go somewhere and see the real springtime."

Arline looked almost startled, for an instant, then her delight overcame every other feeling and she cried happily:

"Yes, ma'am, oh, yes'm, I'd love to go!" and was away, up the spiral iron staircase to her lofty dressing-room.

Felicity

Felicity found herself looking forward with peculiar pleasure to the morrow. She was surprised, when she came to think of it, that she had never thought of asking Arline before. When she remembered what The Old Man had been to her when she was Arline's age, she marvelled that she could so far have forgotten her decent obligations as to have no thought of passing on some degree of like pleasure to a lonely little mummer in her own company. Truth to tell, she had never thought of herself as having anything to pass on compared with what The Old Man had given her, and she had not, of course—nor yet of his lavish winsomeness, and his content to keep giving and giving in a quarter whence he could get little but the spur of deep attention. But she had not, either, come to that age where her loneliness, long since despairing of anything like equable companionship, could be put to flight by the pleasure of reminiscence and the benevolence of stimulating youth.

"If only," she thought, as she laid her head on her pillow that night, "that child shows some spirit of willingness to accept me as a human being and forget that I am a 'star,' I may have a happy day to-morrow. *I* never was conscious of The Old Man's celebrity. I rated him solely for what he was to me, and I don't doubt that's why he liked my company so well."

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But Arline, when she was shown into Felicity's sitting-room the next morning at ten, was quite evidently conscious she was going out with her star, and showed a constraint of manner which was only in a small degree her fault, and in greater degree Felicity's, and in greatest degree the fault of circumstance. It is a very delicate business, this business of being famous—of working like mad to demonstrate that you are extraordinary, and then exacting of people that degree of deference that proves your power, nicely concealed under that degree of friendliness which makes you comfortable.

Arline had never been to Miss Fergus's rooms, the background of her unprofessional hours, before, and she was fascinated by their luxury and the evidences of popularity they showed. Aspiring girl that she was, she was seeing herself in like situation, some day, and was so palpably impressed by the emoluments of fame that Felicity, herself impatient with the failure of the emoluments to satisfy, was impatient, too, with the little eager girl, for not knowing how ashy was the Dead Sea fruit that hung above her reach.

They took a New York Central train and went up the river as far as Yonkers, then wandered off on foot toward the open country to the east. In a grocery they passed on their way through town, Felicity bought fruit and crackers and cheese, dal-

Felicity

lying so delightedly over her purchases and showing such interest in the stock that the grocer was amused.

"How much cheese," she asked earnestly, "do you suppose we two could eat?"

The grocer was not sure whether this was a catch-question or a joke or mere young-housekeeper ignorance, so he cross-questioned, Yankee-wise:

"When? At one time?"

"Yes, for a picnic luncheon."

"I should think half a pound would be plenty." He indicated with his broad cheese knife about how big a slice half a pound would be. Felicity laughed.

"That's cheese rations for a month," she said.

"Can't you cut a littler piece—cut a quarter?"

Then she made like estimates of their capacity in sweet and soda crackers, in pickles and dried dates, and deliberated about the purchase of a can of sardines with a patented opening device.

She was so honestly enjoying herself that the grocer waited on her with a relish he would not have dreamed possible short of a big, general-replenishing order.

"Wasn't that fun?" she cried to Arline, when they were out upon their way, bundle-laden. But Arline could not comprehend.

"I guess you never had to buy your real meals that way," she said.

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"No," admitted Felicity, "I never did."

"Well, I have," the girl answered, in a tone that made Felicity stop and face her.

"You must think I'm crazy," she said, self-reproachfully, "and I guess I am—bringing you out here on this queer orgy of mine to treat you to a tramp on the roads and a lunch of crackers. What I ought to have done to give you pleasure was to take you for a long drive in Central Park, in a victoria, behind a pair of horses with clanking chains, and then given you a luncheon at Delmonico's."

Arline protested, but so feebly that Felicity was the more convinced. To abandon the jaunt would have mortified the girl, keenly, so they kept on; but Felicity had lost her zest for it, and after a fair pretence at enjoying the country, they took an early train for town.

"Now, you keep this cab," said Felicity, at the door of the Sandringham, where they arrived about half-past four, "and go home and dress up a bit—I know you'd rather—and come back here within an hour and we'll go to Delmonico's to dine. I'm bound you sha'n't be starved, poor child, on the day I dragged you off on one of my freakish festivities."

Accordingly, at a little before six the two went into Delmonico's where, on Mr. Leffler's orders, a table was in readiness for Miss Fergus, who was

Felicity

shown to it with a marked deference that delighted her guest. In accordance with the rule of the restaurant, Leffler was "retained," but he had a genius for being present and yet not present, which made him one of the most sought-after men in his exacting business.

Arline was radiant; early diners coming in recognized Felicity at once and their table was a focus of interest which gave the aspiring girl thrills of present satisfaction and foreshadowed triumph. Felicity, fighting against her own disappointment and striving, in real contrition for her selfish mistake, to give her guest a happy time at last, was charming, though conscious of a graciousness in her manner which she hated. The Old Man was never gracious, she reflected; he was delightful because he wanted to be, could not help being—or he was not delightful at all, did not stay in the vicinity. Why did she never seem to learn his ways?

As they were finishing their dinner, Vincent came in, with a party of eight. He was looking unusually handsome, even for him, and was in blithe good spirits of the sort that Felicity had so often, of late, found contagious.

"Well, well!" he cried, gayly, coming over to her table and grasping in the heartiest friendliness the hand she held out to him, "what's up? having a party?"

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"Yes—don't we look party-fied? Miss Prentiss, Mr. Delano."

"Why, this is Caroline!" said Vincent, calling her by the name she bore in the play, and shaking her hand quite as heartily as he had shaken Felicity's.

Arline flushed with pleasure. Vincent had not ceased to thrill the hearts of sweet sixteen; his fame as a popular idol was not yet dim by any means, though there were younger men climbing into his place, or toward it.

He chatted for a minute or two, then turned to rejoin his party, but as he moved away Felicity laid a detaining hand on his arm.

"I want to see you," she said. "When can you come and have a talk with me?"

Vincent pondered. For an unoccupied man he was extraordinarily busy, and though he did not always keep the full quota of his engagements, he always tried to—always made an effort to remember what else he had promised before further engaging any specific time.

"I could come Sunday evening," he said, after a little thought, "would that do?"

"Admirably. Will you come to dinner?"

"No," said Vincent quickly, thinking of a probable dinner in the sitting-room where he had seen Aunt Elie lying, confined, and dreading a too quiet tête-à-tête. "No, I'll come for you

Felicity

at seven and take you some place you never were before."

"Where?"

"Sha'n't tell you—it's to be a surprise; that's the best part of it."

He moved off, laughing, leaving her laughing too. Arline looked after him with shining eyes. Nothing in Felicity's success so impressed her as the terms on which she could meet Vincent Delano. "Isn't he perfectly splendid?" she exclaimed with girlish exuberance. And Felicity, smiling at her, remembered a girl who had slept with Vincent's picture under her pillow and worn his letters next her heart. She told Arline of the night in Cincinnati—with reservations—and enjoyed the girl's enthusiasm for Vincent's chivalry more than she had enjoyed anything in many a day.

"And how proud he must be of you now!" cried Arline, scenting a romance and not disingenuous enough to give the lie to her suspicion.

"Oh, I don't know." Felicity shrugged her shoulders in a manner intended to convey much lightness of mind with regard to herself and Vincent; but Arline was not deceived.

That was Thursday night of the last week but one of her season. In ten days she would be free, but she was without an idea of what she wanted to do with her freedom. This was the first summer

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she had ever had to spend alone and she shrank from every thought of it as if such shrinking would keep her from the actuality.

As Sunday night drew near she fell to wondering what she could say to Vincent that would seem like a definite reason for wanting to talk with him and would not betray her desire merely to see him and enjoy him. Her unwillingness to bid him come for the latter reason, ought to have warned her that she was getting "deep in," but it did not, and she continued, without suspecting herself, to feel around in her mind for some matter-of-fact topic wherewith to justify that detaining hand on his arm, that urgent bidding to him to come.

When he arrived she was still without a shadow of an excuse for having summoned him, but she need not have worried; Vincent gave no sign of expecting one, but acted as if it were the most natural, inevitable thing in the world that Felicity should ask him to come and see her, and that he should come. His complete ease of manner put her at once in a like mood, and she laughed as happily as a child anticipating a treat, as he helped her into her little coat. She teased to know where they were going, but he only looked mysterious and refused to answer.

"Do you mind a walk, or shall I call a cab?" he asked when they reached the street.

"I'd rather walk," she assured him; and they

Felicity

went through to Broadway and then down, on that brilliant thoroughfare, to a restaurant much patronized by lesser (and some few greater) theatrical and racing people and by that part of the general public that dearly likes to look at its entertainers at the close range of a neighboring table.

Felicity had never been here, had never felt any desire to come, but to-night the glare of it, the blare of the noisy orchestra, the self-conscious chatter of the crowd, were by no means an unwelcome novelty. Vincent was on his native heath; he walked with a joyous step and, as Felicity said, quoting her Lewis Carroll, "burbled as he came." He loved the lilt of the air the orchestra was playing—*Little Annie Rooney*—and hummed it audibly as he followed the head waiter down the long lines of people, many of whom he knew, to a table reserved for him. He loved the ripple of interest he always carried in his wake, and to-night he was enjoying the whispered comments that followed the general recognition of Felicity. They were wondering how in the deuce he ever came to be Miss Fergus's escort, and to this place, he reflected, amusedly, and told Felicity about it when they had settled themselves at their table.

"I wonder what these people think of me?" she asked. "They think I'm queer—don't they? Or uppish? The Old Man could have come in here and had every human being in the place beam

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benignly on him. I wonder why I never learn any of his ways?"

"Oh," said Vincent, kindly, "it's pretty hard for a woman, a young and beautiful woman, to be hail-fellow-well-met without being—well, too easy, don't you know."

"It seems," she observed, thoughtfully, "that democracy for women is a failure, and never more so than for women on the stage. We have to hold ourselves so stiff it's small wonder if people think we're full of self-esteem and silly snobbery."

"I guess that's so," assented Vincent, who had never thought of this thing in just this way before. But experience, if not nature, had made Vincent keen; what he lacked in natural depth was made up for—quite amply in some instances—by the breadth of his first-hand knowledge of life. He knew Felicity was supersensitive on this subject of her isolation; he knew that she could not talk about it to many persons, and that her talking about it to him was due not so much to her belief that he would understand, as to the sheer necessity of unbosoming herself to some one and her hope that at least he would not, as so many others would, misunderstand.

"It is hard for you, you poor child, isn't it?" he broke out with sudden sympathy as the situation dawned on him. And Felicity, undone by the commiseration in his tone, felt her eyes fill.

Felicity

Vincent did not miss that tell-tale shining, and in the appeal it made to his protective instinct, he forgot, as it were, the quite dizzy eminence of the woman before him and talked to her as if she were again a little ingénue of The Old Man's company.

"Every now and then," he said, laughing, but deeply serious under his banter, "some one gets up a lot of talk about ameliorating the lot of the chorus girls, but no one ever thinks of a society for making life brighter for celebrated comédiennes. It's a shame, isn't it? No, really! I mean it! People don't think how difficult things are for you, and they *are* difficult, I can see. But you oughtn't to keep comparing yourself with The Old Man and feeling bad because you can't do as he did. 'Tisn't fair to yourself; he wasn't hampered as you are."

"I know," she answered, gratefully, "but it isn't that alone; he had something about him that was so—well, so full of sweet humanness that no one could ever misjudge him. I don't see any reason to hope I'll ever have that about me, and yet—I try to be like him! No! don't comfort me with sweet nothings; I know you mean well, but that's not what I want. I don't want any one to tell me my way's as good as his, because I know it isn't. But I wish I knew if my way is as good as it can be, 'considering'! He'd know! And

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he'd tell me, too. But you can't know—and you couldn't tell; you're too young, and too gallant. Ah, that's just it!" she went on, finding comfort for herself; "we haven't lived long enough to be wise, and people know it. When I meet a cripple on the street, for instance, I turn away lest he see the pity in my eyes—they must get so tired of pity!—but when The Old Man met one, he had a way of smiling into his face with a look of 'Well, pardner, I see you're up against it, same's we all are, each in our different way,' and he always got a brave smile back. *I* can't do that! I suppose because I'm young and people think I must be hard because I happen to be successful. Age hasn't many compensations for an actress, but I hope that'll be one of mine."

"Yes," said Vincent, absently. Something at a neighboring table had withdrawn his attention, and Felicity smiled indulgently to see how soon his brief mood for analysis faded. There was a great deal of the child about Vincent, in spite of his thirty-eight years, but Felicity liked him none the less for having to humor him.

They did not resume their serious conversation, but gave themselves over to watching the people around them, about many of whom Vincent knew interesting things, and nearly all of whom offered opportunity for interesting conjecture.

"There's little Clo Det over there," said Vin-

Felicity

cent, indicating with a nod, "Clorinda Detmar, you remember. She was ingénue in our company the season after you left, and married Jack Ashley, the very last fellow on earth Clo ought to have married. She was a jolly little soul, frisky as a kitten, and meaning no more harm. I used to be mighty sorry for her on the road; she'd get so homesick she could hardly stand it, and—well, you know how those things go! Ashley was there, and he'd shown her a few little attentions, and they won her, poor child. He was horribly jealous of her, and they had the devil's own time. When she couldn't stand it any more, she left him—and has been having the devil's own time ever since, from all I hear. It's a shame, for there wasn't a mean streak in her—only, things got too much for her."

There was genuine feeling in Vincent's voice, and Felicity liked him better for it than for anything else she had ever known about him. She was absolutely without censoriousness herself and was strongly appealed to by any evidence of like tenderness in others. She knew the hard, hard life of the stage so well, she was always full of pity for those who succumbed to its temptations. She could not often go to the theatre, but when she did, it was more likely to be the players that absorbed her than the play. At a comic opera, when the stage was full of smiling,

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dancing girls in gay costumes, she would sit and watch the scene through tears. "There are so many tragedies behind those smiles," she would say, "perhaps they're sordid, mean, but God knows how easy it was to get into them, and how hard it is to get out."

"You know," said Vincent, still looking at Clo Detmar, "how you'd feel if you knew some one was driving that little Prentiss girl to the devil."

"Yes, indeed," said Felicity, little dreaming how this remark would recur to her in connection with the great tragedy of her life, years afterwards. She told him about her experience with Arline on Thursday, and laughed at herself for her absurdity. Speaking of her leisure made Vincent think to ask her what she was going to do for the summer.

She did not know, she said; and told him something of her dilemma. Vincent was wise enough to appreciate, and to marvel at, the entire lack of coquetry wherewith Felicity described her aloneness; he thought, not without reason, that Felicity still liked him pretty well; he thought that perhaps, if he asked her to marry him she might at least consider it seriously. And yet, he reflected, she talked to him in this way which other women would almost certainly have made suggestive, with a simple directness of which he should never dream of taking advantage. Even if he had been burn-

Felicity

ing with ardor to marry Felicity, he would not have dared to broach the subject then; such a blunder would have cost him all his chances of success, and would have hurt her irreparably. There was something about her very frankness that gave her protection—something that kept a fellow constantly in mind of "the decent thing to do."

He suggested one or two people she might take abroad with her for company, but she shook her head; none of them appealed to her as steady company for eight weeks.

"What's become of The Old Man's daughter you used to be so fond of?" he asked, at his wits' end.

"She's in Millville; we buried Aunt Elie from her house, you know."

"That's so; I remember. Well, why don't you see if she wouldn't like to go to the Paris Exposition or to the seashore."

"I wonder if she would! I'd rather have her than anybody."

" 'Present company excepted,' please! "

Felicity flushed. That was too near the truth to joke about, but Vincent's manner was so gayly impersonal she could not resent it.

"I didn't know you had become available as a chaperon," she said.

"Seems as if I ought to be, doesn't it?" he returned, smiling whimsically, "but I don't believe

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any one has ever seriously considered me for the rôle."

"No," she granted him, laughingly, "I don't believe any one ever has."

"Where are *you* going to spend your summer?" she asked, after they had reached the street and were facing homeward.

"Don't know, I'm sure; haven't thought much about it. Been enjoying my enforced vacation so much I haven't looked ahead, to speak of."

"Have you made your plans for next year?"

"'Nary plan."

Felicity was silent for some minutes as they strolled up Broadway. Then, as they turned into her cross-street to go through to Fifth Avenue she said, quite abruptly, "Seaforth hasn't been re-engaged for my company; would you care for his place?" Arthur Seaforth had been her leading man for two years.

Vincent was thoroughly surprised; he had never expected such an offer, and least of all that she would make it. But again there was that about her which forbade one's presuming on her frankness.

"Why, sure I would," he answered, heartily. Then, conscious of an impulse to make her feel that he understood the offer to have been made in a fine comradeship, he added, "It'd be like old times, wouldn't it?"

"As near as we can ever get old times back,



Felicity

I suppose. I don't know what Garvish may have in mind—I haven't mentioned the matter to him for several days—but I daresay he'd as lief please me as not, if there's no reason why he shouldn't. Here! let's sit down a minute and talk about it."

She indicated the tall, brown-stone stoop of a house already boarded up for the summer. "I can't ask you to my sitting-room at this hour of the night," she explained, in amusement, "and we can't stand on the corner, like folks whom nobody observes. Isn't it ridiculous? Next year I'm going to have a house in New York, if I'm only in it a month. At present, let's occupy these lower steps for a few minutes, and enjoy the gorgeous night, while we talk things over."

The street was very quiet and none too well lighted, so that they were in small danger of recognition by any of the few people who passed. The night was unusually warm, with a soft, warm breeze blowing from the south and bringing with it a caressing touch of the sea. High overhead the nearly full moon rode, magnificent, above the jagged line of roofs and chimneys; and although cable cars clanged at the Broadway corner of the long block, a really quite restful hush pervaded the cañon-like street of tall, dark houses so closely alike.

"Isn't this a great adventure!" said Felicity, thoroughly enjoying both the mockery and

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unusualness of it. And then they fell to discussing her professional plans for next season, and how Vincent might fit into them, quite as if neither of them had an idea of the other save as a thespian.

It was an hour later when Vincent helped her to her feet and they resumed their stroll to the hotel. No fewer than a score of cards on her sitting-room table told Felicity of callers she had missed, but as she looked them over, half-interestedly, she did not note one she regretted. She was curiously well pleased with her evening.

CHAPTER XV

"PEOPLE ALWAYS TALK"

DATING from that night at the actors' restaurant, it seemed as if all things conspired to work Felicity's way and to promise her a pleasant summer.

Frances Allston could, and would, accept her invitation to spend a summer by the sea, somewhere where Mr. Allston and Adams could get to them for Sundays, and straightway Mr. Leffler was charged with finding a suitable place for occupancy by June first. It must be convenient for the Allstons, and quiet enough so that Felicity would not be stared at by curious hordes, and there were a lot of other stipulations. But the capable Mr. Leffler managed to keep within them all—perhaps because he did not have to keep within any particular price short of the fabulous—and Felicity's address for the summer became Fair View, West Harbor Point, Massachusetts.

As she had surmised, Garvish had no objection to pleasing her when there was no reason why he should not; and while he might not himself have picked Vincent for the place, he was by no means

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unwilling, if the star wanted him, to engage Vincent for leading man of the Fergus company, for a season of forty weeks, opening in Philadelphia.

After that was decided, it seemed the inevitable thing that Vincent should be with her a goodly part of each beautiful May day, talking over the plays and how to play them, as they drove or idled in the Park or lunched at some favorite place. No other leading man had ever done as much—but Felicity did not remember that. Vincent was nothing if not a beau cavalier, and no woman ever trailed in her wake a more attentive knight than he was—to whatever woman he was with. His courtesy lacked nothing but discrimination; knowing it was the same for every woman, no woman could feel as flattered by it as she might wish.

But Felicity was not quarrelling with Vincent for what he was not. She had established a happy companionship with him that robbed her days of their worst lonesomeness and filled her nights with pleasant anticipations of the morrow, and she was too content with the mere sense of human fellowship to be exacting. She stayed in New York for a week after her season closed, attending to business when must be, idling with Vincent when possible. They went to the theatre together on several nights, and attracted nearly as much attention as the players on the stage. Felicity's beauty, in her black dress, was almost startling, and people

Felicity

watched her fascinatedly, looking for the famous smile which was not infrequent in Vincent's hearty company. She had lost her morbid consciousness of a month ago, and unwittingly was testifying to the virtue of Vincent's cheerful philosophy, and so engrossed in her pursuit of pleasure as not to think what people might be saying or thinking about her.

When she left New York, the first of June, it was with the understanding that Vincent was to run down to West Harbor Point some time before long, and "see how she was fixed for the summer."

He put her aboard her train on the Monday morning of her departure and stocked her drawing-room with new magazines, candy, and flowers. Vincent always had money to spend; no matter how much he threw away, there always seemed to be more to throw after it. No one quite knew where he got it—least of all Vincent himself, perhaps—but not many attempted to figure out Vincent's finances. It was his fortune in life that every one was amiably disposed to take him as he was and indisposed to inquire into what he was not.

There was no one but themselves in the little drawing-room, those few minutes before the train pulled out; Celeste was sedately ensconced without, and the indefatigable Mr. Leffler was at Fair View, seeing to the last touches of preparation. Vincent had undertaken to see Felicity off, and to

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do for her all the things Mr. Leffler would have done had he been with her as usual.

“Sure you have everything?” he said, now, towering splendidly above her in charming solicitude. “Let me see: your baggage’s checked; I’ve given your tickets to the conductor; I’ve wired Leffler you’re getting off all right; I’ve a memo. of what you want me to tell Garvish. Was there anything else?”

“Nothing I can think of, thank you. You’re a dear, to look after me so beautifully.”

“You’re a dear, to let me,” returned Vincent, gallantly.

Outside, on the long platform, the conductor waved his signal to the engineer; the wheels beneath them began to turn.

“Oh, you must go!” she cried, nervously. She turned away her face as she spoke, but Vincent saw that her eyes were full of tears and her lip was quivering.

“I’m going,” he said, bending over her, “but I’m coming, pretty soon.” And so whispering, he laid an arm about her shoulders and, drawing her to him, kissed her cheek, and in a twinkling he was gone; and Felicity, looking out, mistily, saw him waving to her from the platform.

Vincent was thoughtful, as he left the trainshed and passed through the crowded waiting-room

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where more than one recognizing glance followed him, unheeded, and more than one worshipper whispered "Delano!" excitedly as he passed. Characteristically indisposed to effort, Vincent always drifted with the current of events; but the current had been pretty swift of late, and he wondered if he oughtn't to "beach his craft," for a bit, and think over the direction he was taking. What that direction was, he thought he knew; but that he was satisfied with it he was not at all sure. Even the most easy-going of men has learned, by the time he is verging on forty, that it is easier to stop short of some situations than to get out of them, and Vincent knew that when he next saw Felicity he would have either to live up to that kiss of a moment ago, or to ignore it in a way which would unmistakably mean retraction. Felicity was not a woman one kissed just because she was kissable. Vincent felt committed, and the feeling chafed him. He wondered how he had been "such an ass" as to do a thing like that without counting the cost. How could he go on with his next season's work and ignore that parting which was so full of promise? And, on the other hand, how could he live up to it? Vincent could not help feeling a comfortable complacency when he reflected that, rich and charming and successful and evidently fond of him as Felicity was, he hesitated about asking her to marry him until he was sure

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just how he felt about her. There seemed to him to be something “terribly decent” about his hesitation, something of which not every fellow he knew would have been capable, and he could not help liking himself better than ever because of it. That there might have been anything disingenuous in his actions during the last six weeks, never occurred to him. It was the little matter of the kiss that bothered Vincent, that, as he expressed it to himself, “put things in a devil of a mess.”

But presently he came out upon Forty-second Street with its familiar bustle and roar, and as he swung along with his graceful, long-limbed stride, his natural buoyancy reasserted itself. The June sky was bright, the sun was not too warm, the women were out in their nattiest light toggerly: it was Vincent’s version of Pippa’s song, his equivalent for “the lark’s on the wing and the hillside’s dew-pearled,” and as the exercise of brisk walking sent the blood pulsing more swiftly through his veins, he took on again that normal mood of his in which, had he known of Pippa, he might have echoed “all’s right with the world.”

At the corner of Sixth Avenue, close under the shadow of the Elevated, he met a theatrical acquaintance.

“Hear you’ve signed with Garvish for the Fergus company,” said this man, after greetings had been exchanged. “Pretty good berth, I guess?”

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Yes, Vincent thought he would like it. Then the acquaintance, eying him narrowly, ventured a bit further.

"Rather strong in that quarter, aren't you?"

"Oh," said Vincent, nonchalantly, "we've known each other for a dozen years or more. I did Miss Fergus a trifling service the night she got her first chance, and she's never forgotten it."

"Lucky dog! All the people I've ever done anything for are gone broke. Well, be good to yourself!"

There was something in the inflection of that parting speech, something in the look that accompanied it, that made Vincent hot with resentment. For an instant he struggled with the desire to call the fellow back and hit him. But you can hardly hit a man for the expression in his eye, or because you do not like his tone of voice; and anyway, the offender was a little wasp of a chap whom Vincent would have scorned to strike, though he had been known, once, to spank a fellow of like size—just regularly, under severe provocation, to turn him dexterously over and paddle him. That would hardly do on Sixth Avenue, however, and besides, to resent the taunt was to make tacit admission that it hurt.

So Vincent swung along on his way, but his bright mood was gone again—momentarily. Peo-

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ple were talking about him and Felicity, were they? They were saying, doubtless, that he was making the most of her friendship for him to further his own interests. It was not often that Vincent found himself caring what people said; but just now he was too perturbed to be philosophical. He would show people! Thought he was a fortune-hunter, did they? Well, they should see! “I may be a *matinée* idol,” said Vincent, savagely, as if admitting a deep disgrace, “but I’ve got some decency about me, and I’m not the kind of man that hangs on to a woman’s skirts for a living. I’m not on my uppers, yet, I guess, and if I were, it wouldn’t be from a woman I’d go hunting a boost. No, sir! I—why, hello, Clo!”

As he turned the corner of Broadway to go south he ran into Clo Detmar. She was looking more than a trifle seedy, this morning, and, conscious as she was of her shabbiness, the cordiality of Vincent’s greeting halted her, when otherwise she would have gone quickly by. The evident willingness of Delano, the popular idol, to stand talking with her in her conspicuous lack of summery attire, on that prominent corner, with half their world parading by on its morning outing, delighted her, and she responded eagerly to his good-natured questions—so eagerly that Vincent felt his old, pleasureable conceit of himself return-

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ing, and in a delicious suffusion of kindness asked Clorinda to lunch.

"I'm not dressed up," she faltered.

"Oh, pshaw! What d'you care? Everybody knows you've got better clothes, and that's all that matters."

Clorinda wished she knew if he really thought so, or if he were lying gallantly to comfort her. It would be nice to think that some one who knew her in the old days still believed her prosperous; it never occurred to Clo that there could be any one who would still believe her good. But Vincent's manner was non-committal—charmingly free of benevolent condescension, and as charmingly free of that something which bespeaks the lack of respect.

So to lunch they went, to a place chosen by Vincent with rare tact—a place not so fine that Clo would feel uncomfortably shabby by contrast, but fine enough so that she could have no suspicion he was ashamed to be seen with her among his more prosperous acquaintances. Her appreciation of his choice was so evident that Vincent, enjoying to the full his own kindness, nearly forgot his previous irritation.

"Saw you the other night," he said, looking up from his attentive study of the bill of fare.

"Yes. My, but I was surprised to see you come walking in with Felicity Fergus!"

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"I was kind o' surprised to see myself," he admitted. "She'd never been there before; I thought it'd do her good, so I took her."

"I suppose once was enough for her?"

"Oh, I don't know—I think she enjoyed it. She seemed to."

"It's a mystery to me how she went through all they say she did in her climbing days and kept so unearthly good."

"She isn't unearthly good! That is, I mean—she's good, but it doesn't strike you as unearthly, when you know her. She's a tremendously human sort o' person, when you get into her confidence."

"None o' the Anderson chill about her?"

"Now, there you're mistaken again!" Vincent interposed. "I was in Miss Anderson's company for two seasons, you know, and though I can't say I ever got awfully well acquainted with her, I did get to know she's a delightful woman and not the least bit cold, as her critics say. She has a jolly sense of humor, though it's nothing to Miss Fergus's. But when you know Miss Fergus well, what you mostly think about her is that she's a kind of pathetic person."

Clo looked incredulous.

"Yes," said Vincent, "pathetic; that's just it—just the impression she gives you."

"She never gave it to me," retorted Clo, with

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some bitterness. "She always gave me the impression of being a spoiled child of fortune—of having a lot more than one woman's fair share of things that every woman wants."

"Well, you see you never knew her. You can't tell what people are like at long range."

"We can't all get at close range, like you," said Clo, in good-natured banter.

Vincent flushed. "I suppose you've heard gossip, too," he said, resentfully. And then, not stopping to think how strange a person Clo was to pick for his confidences, nor to reflect that there probably was not one of his friends in good and regular standing to whom he would not have felt it an indelicacy to mention his quandary about Felicity, he began to plead his case before Clorinda Detmar, who listened with warm sympathy.

"I wouldn't care what people say," she counselled; no counsel comes easier to all of us—to give! "If she's a good friend of yours and wants you in her company, and you like her and want to be there, you'd be a fool not to go. People may talk, but will they get you as good a place, if you give this one up? That's the way I look at it."

There was something in that, Vincent admitted, but it did not cover the whole situation.

"I can get plenty of good places," he said, a little loftily, "I've always been able to. But the

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thing is, I don't want people talking about—well, thinking there's more between us than friendship, when there isn't. It isn't fair to her.”

Clo laughed. “You talk like a schoolboy,” she said. “People always talk. If you live in a nunnery, they say it's because you were disappointed in love, and ten-to-one they concoct some affair for you with the spiritual adviser. What do you care what people think? They're bound to think something about you, and it's bound not to be true. You see, they think Mary Anderson's cold, and they certainly don't know Felicity Fergus is pathetic. You just have to go ahead and ignore 'em. I guess Miss Fergus is used to being talked about, and thought about; a little more won't hurt her. But if you think she might care, why don't you tell her, and see what she says?”

Vincent did not answer immediately, and Clo, looking up suddenly, caught a curious expression on his face.

“I—I wouldn't quite like to do that,” he said, lamely; “it—well, it would hardly be the thing to do, it seems to me.”

She was about to question why, when something drove all thought of Felicity from her mind: she saw Jack Ashley coming toward them, and that he had been drinking, though it was so early in the day. His face was working horribly in one of his jealous furies wherewith he still, on occasion, pur-

Felicity

sued her, though their paths were supposed to lie as far as the poles asunder.

Vincent's back being toward Ashley, he did not see him until Clo's little choking cry of fright made him turn in the direction of her startled gaze. As he turned, Ashley struck him full in the face, and without an instant's hesitation, Vincent returned the blow, with interest.

"Don't, oh, don't!" begged Clo, rising to her feet and tremblingly raising a hand in intervention. But they paid no heed to her and clinched, only to be separated immediately by waiters and patrons.

"He," said a waiter, indicating Ashley, "come right up to the gentleman, here, an' hit 'im without sayin' a word. I seen him."

"Yes, damn him, that's my wife with him!" cried Ashley.

Furious as he was, Vincent could only forbear to ask what crime it was to buy a lunch for Clo, to whom Ashley had not given as much in five years. There was nothing he could say in his own defence that would not be unchivalrous to poor Clo, and the realization of this maddened him more than the smart of Jack Ashley's blows.

The proprietor came hurrying to the battleground. "I can't have any fighting here, gentlemen, or any scenes. If you can't settle this matter peaceably, I'll have to ask you all to leave."

"The devil you will!" retorted Vincent his

“People Always Talk”

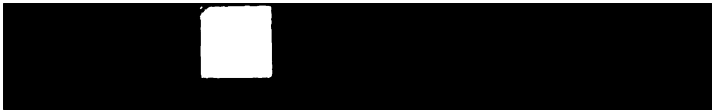
choler rising past control. “Can you look at that intoxicated brute and expect me to pacify him with sweet words? It’s your business to put him out and preserve the peace, while I eat the meal I’ve ordered and am willing to pay for.”

Ashley, at this, lunged heavily and struck at the proprietor—his maudlin, insensate rage shifting as causelessly to the man who interfered as it had originally fastened itself on Vincent. Immediately, the proprietor sent for the police, and Vincent’s little party ended at the Thirtieth Street Police Station, where poor Clo begged in vain to have Ashley released. “God knows what he’ll do to me when he gets out,” she wept. “Oh, there ought to be some kind of law to protect me and my friends from such persecution!” she cried. “Just because I was fool enough, when I was nineteen, to marry that beast, I oughtn’t to have to spend all my life in fear of rows like this! What chance has a woman in my case, I’d like to know.”

Vincent said what he could to soothe her, but the whole episode had nauseated him and he was inwardly cursing the luck that had led him into it.

“And the papers!” said Clo, “think of the papers! It’ll get in ’em, of course.”

It would, of course. Vincent could see the headlines now: “Actor Delano in Tenderloin Station. Jealous Husband Uses Fists in Café Row.” Ugh! It was hideous! As Clo said, there ought to be



Felicity

some law which would protect an innocent person from such happenings as this.

It was the silly season in Park Row, and every paper had room to spare for the story. Vincent reckoned, at the week's end, that he had answered five thousand efforts at chaff on the subject, from as many jocular acquaintances, and gnashed his teeth in rage at his impotence in the whole affair.

What he did not know about it, however, was that a woman in West Harbor Point read of that episode with burning cheeks, and, not clearly conscious why she did so, thrust the New York paper containing it into the fire before any one else in her household had a chance to look it over.

CHAPTER XVI

THE SHINING PATH TO THE MOON

JUNE passed, at Fair View, without bringing Vincent, but Felicity did not miss him—greatly. She was very happy with Frances Allston and their common memories; very happy with the sea and with her freedom from interruption and curious interest, and with her house. Frances declared she had never seen any one else get such ecstatic satisfaction out of bargaining with “the travelling meat market,” as Felicity called the butcher who made his tri-weekly rounds with his stock in a canvas-covered wagon; never had supposed it possible for a hot kitchen to be such a palace of delights as it seemed to Felicity, who had an insatiable desire to whisk eggs and sift flour and roll pie crust and cut cookies and fry doughnuts, and do a world of other things which, to her starved wanderer’s sense, seemed the most enchanting, inner mysteries of that haloed thing, the common lot.

“If you’re so crazy about housekeeping,” said Frances, one day, “why don’t you quit the stage and marry and settle down?”

Felicity

Felicity's eyes twinkled with humorous appreciation. "Why don't I?" she echoed, whimsically. "Maybe it's because I suspect that these fascinating butcher-men and egg-beaters might not continue so engrossing, if I made work of 'em, instead of play. Maybe—" she began, as if another probability occurred to her, but the expression of her face changed suddenly and Frances knew she left something unconfessed.

"I'm going to have a house in the fall," she went on, "even if I only stay in it a few weeks each year. I'm going to have a place where I can accumulate things, and sit down and gloat over my possessions. I've always had to travel light, to live in a trunk, so to speak. While Aunt Elie was with me I wouldn't let myself think of a house, because she'd have made such a responsibility of it, and she wasn't able to do it. And now I'm so sorry I didn't have one anyway, and manage somehow about the responsibility. I wish I had a house where Aunt Elie had lived and died—but I can't buy that now—can I? I wish I had a house where The Old Man had been, and left memories! I'd rather have the littlest house on earth where he had been, than the biggest, all empty of him! I can't buy a home, you see—only a house. If I'd only bought a year ago! so Aunt Elie could have been in it—but I was afraid she'd take it too hard——"

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"Somebody always has to make a responsibility of housekeeping," said Frances, rather soberly. "It takes positive generalship to run a house agreeably."

Felicity looked dismayed. "I shall have to hire a general," she said, dolefully, "as well as a companion. I sha'n't mind the general, so much," she went on, "because I can turn her loose and tell her to run things and not to bother me——"

Frances smiled. "You talk about housekeeping just as a man does," she said, "as if you could buy a flawless housekeeper as you buy a flawless diamond, if you have the price."

"Well," returned Felicity, undaunted, "if she isn't flawless I sha'n't mind, much. I can go out to eat, or have in a caterer. You may laugh at me, but I know I can get service—it's one of the things the price will buy. But I can't get companionship—not for money. I've got to have a human being to travel with me next year—some kind of a fellow woman to be in my rooms, to keep me from getting sick with loneliness. I need her for propriety, really; it's not quite comfortable to travel with only a maid. And I need her for company. Anybody'll do for propriety, but where am I to get company—get some one whose strangeness and 'boughtness' won't drive me wild?"

Frances shook her head despairingly. "That's a phase of your business I know little about," she

Felicity

said. "Father's life was so different—a man's always is, of course. And in my days of knowing theatre people well, nearly everybody belonged to stock and lived like other folks. The stars travelled, of course, but I never got well acquainted with any of the women; they came so seldom and stayed so short a time, and never were familiarly at home in our house the way many of the big men were. I suppose most of them had relatives with them—a mother or sister or somebody; I remember that when Rachel was here everybody thought she'd have been so much happier if she'd only had a chance to be lonely! Such a swarm of family as that poor creature had to trail about!"

"I never heard of any of them—the women of the stage, I mean—who was as alone in the world as I am," said Felicity. "Why, nobody on earth belongs to me—that I know of!"

Frances thought best to ignore the tragic aspect of this. "Well," she observed, smiling, "there are plenty who'd like to, I don't doubt."

Felicity kept her own counsel, partly from womanly reticence, partly because it nettled her to remember, of all the thousands who had raved over her art, her beauty, her charm, of all the hundreds who had called her adorable, how few had laid themselves at her feet and how with wounded pride rather than wounded love they had taken their dismissal. One would think, Felicity

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in candor could not help admitting, that beauty and sweetness and brilliance so universally extolled, would have inspired great love in some one; that from somewhere out of the wide, wide world that knew her, a worshipper might have come who would not be said nay. But, no! Probably there were a thousand men who would have been glad to have had her if they knew they could, but there was not one, evidently, who wanted her so that he meant to have her whether or not. She had seen men that determined about women with no tithe of her world-acknowledged loveliness. Why was it? Was The Old Man right, as he nearly always was, when he said that no one was ever loved because of what he was, but in spite of it? She had seen women ardently worshipped in spite of big obstacles; had seen love thrive on what it overcame. Was it, then, one of the cruelest phases of the mockery of success that triumph held love at bay?

It was a rainy morning, and she and Frances after a beguiling hour in the kitchen had gone into the sitting-room, where, with a log blazing on the hearth, more for cheeriness than for warmth (though the east wind was chill), they were sewing and chatting cosily in that sweet, confidential way that women love. Felicity was a good needlewoman, thanks to Amelia's teaching, and found nothing more restful than the plying of her needle.

Felicity

She could always think best as she sewed, she said, and there was no time she talked better, if she had an intimate rocking and sewing by her side. How she and Amelia had sat and sewed, in all sorts of queer nooks, years ago, to get her costumes together! And how, as their fingers flew, their tongues had kept pace, and Felicity had talked herself into her characters even while she fashioned their habiliments. Those were, notwithstanding many hardships, good old days. Now, her costumes were designed and made by artists, her frocks for private wear came from great Paris houses, her lingerie was the product of exquisite skill in convents where meek nuns purveyed to vanities themselves had piously forsworn. There was no need at all for her to sew, and the nice, leisurely habit did not fit in with the life of the road as she travelled now—when luxury and fame complicated things for her as privation and struggle had never done. Celeste sewed now, if sewing needs be done. But this was vacation—beautiful, “different” vacation—and Felicity, besides sewing unneeded things for herself, had been helping Frances make tiny garments for Sadie’s baby that was to be.

She was sewing on one of these now, putting the infinitesimal bit of lace about the bottom of a wee sleeve, and wondering, wistfully, if she would ever be thus employed with a tenderer interest,

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when a boy arrived from the Harbor with telegrams—one for Frances, two for Felicity.

One of Felicity's was from Mr. Leffler, about a house he had found and wanted her to come up and look at. The other was from Vincent, who said: "May I run down for over the Fourth?"

The boy had been told to wait for answers. "Any answer to yours?" said Felicity to Frances. Then, catching sight of the older woman's face she marvelled at its transfigurement; the eyes were full of tears, but joy shone unmistakable in every lineament.

"What is it?" cried Felicity, "has the baby come?"

Frances nodded; she could not speak. Felicity, understanding, went over and, bending above her, gathered the gray head to her young bosom. There it lay for a moment, then Frances raised it and wiped her eyes.

"You don't know, dear," she whispered; "but it's wonderful—so wonderful!"

"I do know!" contended Felicity, refusing to be shut out of this tenderest emotion of the woman heart, "I do know—I can feel every thrill of it, just as if I held my own little, new baby here!" With unconscious dramatic expression she clasped her arms against her breast as if she cuddled a baby there.

Then the waiting boy began to whistle sugges-

Felicity

tively in the hall, and Felicity flew to her desk to write her replies.

"I'm sending congratulations to Morton and Sadie," she said, "do you want to dictate yours to me?"

When the boy was despatched and they were quiet once more, there seemed nothing to talk about but the marvel of the new life out in Chicago, the little girl-baby concerning whom her proud father had wired: "Sarah Frances, weight nine pounds, sends you greeting. Everything favorable."

"Sarah Frances," murmured the grandmother, continuing to reread the wonderful telegram, "is not a very ornamental name——"

"All the better for the wearer, however ornamental she may turn out to be," interposed Felicity with decision in her tones. To Frances's questioning look she answered, laughing, "Oh, I wouldn't have any other name, any more than I'd have any other profession! But sometimes I think perhaps I should have missed some of the irony of my life if I'd been named Sarah Frances instead of Felicity. People seem to feel that my being named Felicity is all a part of my blissful, fabulously *felicitous* existence. Sometimes I wish I were named Ann Eliza—so people might be willing to believe I work for what I get, instead of believing I pick it off a fairy tree. But of course I don't,

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really," she admitted in the same breath, as if fearful of being taken by the unseen powers at her word. "Oh, what a lot o' different people each of us is in here!" she cried, comically, striking her breast with her hand in a conscious theatricalism very unlike her gesture of a few moments before when she had spoken in such passionate earnestness about understanding mother-love.

Two days later, Vincent came, arriving by the evening stage after "knocking around Beantown for a few hours," as he expressed it. If he had come a month ago, Vincent might have felt some constraint, some consciousness on account of that parting moment in the train-shed. But now he had—very nearly—forgotten about it; at least he had forgotten it sufficiently to carry no evident remembrance of it in his manner as he greeted his hostess. It seemed as if she had forgotten, too. But no! that was not like her. Vincent wondered.

West Harbor Point was at the unfashionable end of Buzzard's Bay, and no railroad came nearer to it than New Bedford or Fall River, each eighteen miles away. Visitors had to take stage from either of those points, and guests for Fair View were dropped at a cross-roads a quarter of a mile from town and there picked up by Felicity, driving her surrey.

"Dashing trap, you've got here," laughed Vincent, as he climbed up beside her on the front

Felicity

seat, "theatrical to the limit," and he flicked the fringe that hung around the canopy.

"Hush!" she whispered, though no one was within shouting distance, "that fringe is part of the disguise. Play-actors are not esteemed in these parts and I'm masquerading as a human being. That's one reason why I came; I think I'm tired of being esteemed!"

Vincent grinned his incredulity, and Felicity laughed, as she always did when any one, in Vincent's phrase, "called her bluff."

"You know what I mean," she remonstrated, "you know I like my glory, and I like to run away from it. If you don't know it, I'm going to be so disappointed in you! For most people don't understand it, and so, of course, they can't understand me, and I hate being an enigma; it isn't sociable."

"The deuce you do!" thought Vincent, but he didn't say how far he was from understanding her. It was enough to look at her, today, without trying or even caring to understand, he decided, as they faced toward Fair View, the brilliant late sunshine in their faces.

Felicity wore a dimity dress of an adorable shade of pale pink, and a garden hat to match, tied under her chin with pink dimity strings. The sun seemed for the first few moments of their drive to strike about the brim of her hat and,

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shining through, to cast a truly wonderful rose glow over her face. She looked so different from the woman in the black dress he had dined with that wretched February night in Chicago, that he sat staring at her reflectively, and forgot to talk.

Felicity felt his scrutiny. "You're surprised at my pink dress," she said, "but no one down here knows I'm in mourning, except, of course, the Allstons, and so I don't wear it. I've always hated it, and wear it only as a concession—one of the eternal concessions—to the people who don't understand. Down here, where everything is so glorious with color, I simply can't go around in black; it'd drive me wild to be the one sombre note in a summer world. So I live in blue, like the sea at noon, and in pink, like the last of the afterglow, and in white, like the moonlight on the sand-dunes, and sometimes I almost forget about the musty stage—until I'm honest with myself and own that 'way down deep in me I'm searching every thrill I get to make it yield me something for my art. Why, I can't talk to an ancient mariner down at the wharf, without finding myself thinking: 'Ah, ha! what did I tell So-and-So when he was rehearsing that skipper part! Didn't I tell him he acted as much like an Iowa country storekeeper as like a Yankee salt who had sailed every navigable sea!'"

"Three lengths ahead and running like the

Felicity

wind," thought Vincent, enjoying his own humorous appreciation of the thing, but saying nothing except, "I'm with you on the mourning question; it can't do the dead any good and it keeps the living in the perpetual 'willies.' It's bully to see you looking so well!"

Still not a trace of consciousness of that kiss! Vincent, who had nearly forgotten it until he saw her and then was anxious to forget entirely, was piqued by the very ease he had hoped to find. In any other woman, he reflected, he would not have been so surprised; but in Felicity——

They had two miles to drive, and Felicity, who kept the reins, let the staid old horse saunter through the leafy lanes where, as she remarked with delicious unction, "the last lingering rays of the setting sun were filtering through the trees" when, *not* 'a solitary horseman was seen wending his way across the plain the forest skirted,' but, 'two play actors, in the disguise of *hum*ing beings, were seen skulking through the unfrequented roadway that approached a splendid castle. With outstretched arm, one pointed. "Look!" she murmured, "we draw near. Hist!"'

Her appreciation of crude melodrama was intense; in books, in plays, in pictures, it always fascinated her. She mimicked it inimitably, but she was ever questioning it for the secret of its popularity. "Somewhere in it," she declared, "there's

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a vital principle it behooves us all to learn." The Old Man had taught her this, sitting with her in the galleries of cheap theatres, when opportunity allowed, and watching their neighboring gods as keenly as they watched the play.

Vincent scorned melodrama, and felt sure, from Felicity's mimicry, that she did, too. "At the portcullis," he went on, as they drew up at the gate to the Fair View grounds, "one of the disguised dismounted and in ringing tones commanded it to open. When the warder hesitated, our hero slew him with one hand—the left—while with the other he led his lady's charger through."

"Please close the gate," cautioned Felicity, out of character, "so the cow won't make her escape."

"On what charge," demanded Vincent with the air of a knight errant, "is the lady held prisoner?"

"What melancholy wights draw nigh?" laughed Frances Allston, coming down the steps to greet them. She had heard their laughter as they approached, but was unprepared for the burst of glee her hail incited.

"Oh, good, sweet Heaven! is it in the air?" murmured Vincent. "What place is this that of us all makes mummers as we come? that straight-way twists the common tongue to actors' speech?"

Felicity threw up her hands in a despairing gesture. "I tell you," she said, "if you're not careful, you'll get us all surprised by night and whisked

Felicity

away to Bedlam. If the servants overhear this strange babbling, we'll be undone. They're natives, all, and natives do not so; and as they do not do themselves, they'll brook from no one else; what's not their way is heresy. For, look you, sirs, they're of New England!"

All through supper—to which meal at evening they told Vincent he'd have to get accustomed, as the "help" refused to get accustomed to any other—they were childishly merry, with furtive looks behind ere launching into stagey nonsense, each trying to upset the others' gravity by sudden changes of speech and countenance when the waitress came and went. Vincent was delightfully funny, dropping and reassuming "the disguise of a human being," now acting wild melodrama in Phemie's absence; now, on her return, arresting a brandished fork midway, and sedately conveying it to his mouth with an air of all his mind being intent upon his manners.

Afterward, when he was smoking out on the porch that overlooked the sea, they plied him with questions about people they knew. They had the New York and Boston papers every evening by the stage, but newspapers are poor intelligencers, at best, and there were a thousand things they wanted to know "more authoritatively," Felicity said. For instance, was it generally believed Mary Anderson would not return to the stage? Did he

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know anything more than the papers printed about the sale, to satisfy a mortgage, of John E. Owens's famous place at Aigburth Vale? "What times that place has seen!" both women mused. Was it true that Mrs. Langtry had been sued by her French chef? Had he seen Dick Mansfield since he returned from England, a few days ago, and was his London triumph in Richard III much talked about in New York? June had seen a perfect epidemic in New York of benefits for the Johnstown sufferers; Vincent had taken part in three, they read—"Who," said Felicity, "were the 'also rans'?"

After a while, Frances remembered she had letters to write—time-honored excuse of the tactful!—and begged to be excused for an hour or so. Vincent went in with her, to open the door for her, and to fetch a light shawl for Felicity.

"I'm not cold," she protested, when he wrapped it round her with the charming solicitude habitual with him.

"No, but it's damp; it's bound to be. And I thought maybe you'd come for a stroll along the beach. There's Madame Moon peeking up, now,—waiting for her cue to come on."

They walked along the shore in the direction of the Harbor for a half mile or thereabouts, then turned and retraced their steps to a point near home, where a flat-bottomed rowboat, overturned



Felicity

in the dry sands above tide-mark, invited them, and they sat down.

So far, they had talked of everybody but themselves, of everything but their separate and mutual concerns. Now, as they sat and looked out along the silver path of the moonlight on the dark waters, they fell silent. Felicity, one hand cupping her chin and cheek, seemed lost on the trail of "long, long thoughts," and Vincent, watching her, wondered what they were—found himself wishing he knew if she had heard of the café row over Clo Detmar, and if she thought any less of him for it. But he was afraid to ask.

"You're having a fine, restful time, aren't you?" he said, presently. He was sifting the fine, dry sand through and through his fingers as he sat, wrapped in languorous content with this silvery, voluptuous night, this wholly pleasant situation. It seemed to him, as he watched Felicity, and remembered the scenes of stress he had seen her in twice this year—now only in its zenith—that she must be revelling in this quiet. For himself, Vincent was never rested by quiet, but by change; but he knew Felicity to be different.

"Yes," she answered, "this is the restfullest time I can remember, since—well, *ever*, I think! I was going to say since the years at Briarwood, but though the place, there, is full of soft laziness, those were anything but soft, lazy years I spent

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there. I never saw anything in my life," she went on, musingly, "like dear Aunt Elie's ambition for me. It was unrelenting. All those times were times of toil. . . . But, oh! they were all so interesting! I look back at them now with the keenest regret. . . . There was, for instance, our old Witch of Endor—a derelict old woman, the weirdest creature, who drifted out of the vortex at New Orleans and came, in some way, to be floating from river town to river town, picking up the most precarious living that ever was on land or sea. And when she came to Briarwood, we kept her. Such a looking thing as she was! And we never could improve her. She looked like the mummy of a Rameses, done up in innumerable swathings of prehistoric stuffs. She could take one of Aunt Elie's prim gowns, and when she had put it on, with such revisions and additions as her taste dictated, you would have thought she was fresh from an Egyptian tomb—and that dissipation had reached a stage of high art among the Egyptians! But such gifts! She spoke and wrote seven or eight languages, fluently. She had been everywhere in Christendom, and a good many places that were not Christian—to say the least. She had encountered everybody that ever was heard of in this century, it seemed—political, social, artistic, she knew them all! And how she could play the piano! She had studied with Clara

Felicity

Schumann, and had been much in Liszt's house in Vienna in the days of the Countess; she knew Wagner in his years of bitterest struggle, and could tell all about his anguish in putting a ballet in *Tannhäuser* to make the opera 'go' in Paris. She had known George Sand and De Musset, had lived neighbor to the Felixes when Rachel was enjoying her first triumphs; had—well, I don't know whom she hadn't known, or where she hadn't been. And yet she was a poor old waif, living on the kindly tolerance of anybody she could appeal to in an alien land. We always thought she was a political exile. We *knew* she was a victim of drink and drugs; and whether she was hunted by foreign government spies, as she imagined, or by her own conscience and the horrid shapes of her dissipations, didn't particularly matter. She taught me French and German, and music, and—and other things! Sometimes she would disappear and be gone two or three weeks, or even longer—to New Orleans, on a spree. Always, when she came back, 'they' were 'after' her, and we'd take her in and make much show of hiding her, and in her gratitude and remorse, combined, she'd nearly kill me with overdoses of instruction! . . . Sometimes Aunt Elie and I would go to New Orleans with her, and the queer places she took us! I wouldn't take a great many thousand dollars for what I saw of the French Quarter under old

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Madame's guidance and Aunt Elie's chaperonage. Think of the combination! I learned fencing in New Orleans, of the weirdest, witheredest old man, as mysterious as Madame herself. He lived in a room over a macaroni shop. How I remember that dirty, entrancing shop, where the whole front came out like a shutter, and one could stand on the banquette and watch the old, blind white horse turning the rude machinery that ground out the long, white strings which two men cut off in armfuls and hung up to the rafters to dry. And there was hardly an acquaintance of Madame's whom she could tell about save in a whisper, with many frightened glances back and around, to make sure her friends' pursuers were not listening. To this day I'm burning with curiosity to know whether all those queer people were really arch-conspirators, guilty of high treason, or whether they fancied themselves such, or only Madame so mistook them."

"By Jove!" said Vincent, "you never told me any of this before. It's as interesting as the 'Arabian Nights.'"

"It is, and just as foreign. We went to New Orleans one winter when The Old Man was playing there, at Carnival time, and he went so crazy about our old Witch of Endor—as Grandfather McClintock used to call her—that he insisted on our taking her abroad with us when we went. But,



Felicity

bless you! she went quite wild when we suggested it. Whether she'd poisoned a czar or stolen a pocketbook, she was of no mind to go back to Europe—that was sure."

"You've had some experiences in your brief day, haven't you?"

"Experience! Why, I could write a portly book of memoirs of this sort right now. You see, The Old Man taught me to find experience. Perhaps I was born with this passion for people, this wild desire to 'see their wheels go wound,' as Budge says; but The Old Man taught me how to gratify my passion, and I can never be grateful enough for the wide-eyed vagabondage of those early years. Now, my success shuts me out from all that. A horrid little fanfare goes before me everywhere, and puts people 'on guard' before I come. There's nothing more pathetic about success, I think, than the stiffening effect it has on people we meet. And in our life—here to-day and gone to-morrow—we have no time to impress on those we meet that we're not different because we've achieved; before we can win them to thinking of us as human beings and get them to acting like such themselves, we're gone—to meet other strange, stiff people, who'll grasp us nervously by the hand and say how they enjoyed our acting. Do you know," Felicity laughed softly at the picture she drew, "some day I shall astonish the

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natives—I feel that I shall—by answering some stilted citizen's remark about my acting with, 'Oh, bother my acting! Tell me how long you've been married and if you're still in love with your wife.' "

"Is that what you care most to know?"

"Oh, for one thing. In art we make a great deal of love; we presuppose that it's the most interesting thing in the world to the great majority of people. I always want the testimony of life on this—want to know if it's an old, old fallacy we're keeping up, or if there's something divinely true in the persistent love-ideals of art. Some of us have expression; many haven't. Do we express the majority—we who act and write and paint? that's what I want to know. I play love for people all the time. Everybody says it's the one thing people want, that no play can go without it. I wonder! I wonder if the hunger for love is the dominant passion in most lives, from start to finish. Why, this spring, when we were considering plays for next season, there was one I liked very much; it was the freshest, finest-flavored thing I'd ever had offered to me. But Garvish wouldn't listen to me. 'It's no good,' he insisted, 'the heroine's married twice, and the dear public never takes any stock in second marriages. They believe in love at first sight and one love only through all eternity—no chance of mistaking it, ever, or of going back on it, or of taking up with a counterfeit. They

Felicity

all know better—they must—but they don't want to know better; they want the players and the poets and the story-writers to contradict 'em, to deny their own experience—to take 'em out o' their own experience, I guess.' Now, I want to know if that's so. I want to ask every human being I meet what he thinks about it, instead of listening to his observations on the weather. But I can't! They'd think I was crazy, or, worse, impertinent. I've an almost uncontrollable desire to stop people in the streets, on the cars, and ask them what they want most. I'm green with envy of those fairies who could give folks three wishes—not so much because I yearn to give them what they want—perhaps I'm too wise to wish to do that!—as because I want to know what they'd choose."

"Money—most or all of 'em!" interjected Vincent, with decision.

"Then I'd make 'em tell what for! When I go down in lower New York, and see all those thousands of men hurrying, skurrying, with anxious faces, I want to know what each of them's after money for—whether some woman can't be held unless she gets a pearl necklace, or some social status can't be attained without a steam yacht, or some enemy can't be crushed without the strategy that makes other men chary of his stocks—or what! And when I see the women spending the money, uptown, I want to know what they hope

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to accomplish. Is this gown to enchant a difficult lover, or to make a rival envious, or to impress a social leader—or what? What do they all love, those people? Power? Popularity? I have power and popularity, and I know they don't fill my heart, so why should I suppose they fill anybody's? Then what is it that hearts hunger for? That's what I want to ask these strange, stiff people who say they like my acting. And that's what I can't get at first hand any more, so I have to get it as best I can in books. When I have my house, where I can keep things, I'm going to have every book I can buy that tells honestly what one heart desired of life and what it got, and how it made its compromise. Nobody could look at that, now," indicating the broad path of silvered waters that seemed to lead straight from their nest in the sand to whatever glory the heart desired, "without vague stirrings of wistfulness for something. To every one who sits by any sea to-night, that path leads straight from his feet, as from ours. Where do those paths end for each? If we could only know!"

"What good would it do?" Vincent was not unmoved by her mood, but he felt that it was a very impractical one, out of which she seemed to get a most unrestful yearning that could never by any chance be satisfied, and was, therefore, better dismissed.

Felicity

And she, when the question was put to her thus bluntly, could not answer. The humor of appraising the thing that way appealed to her, though, and she laughed.

When they went in, stepping quietly so as not to wake the sleeping household, Vincent whispered, holding her hand for a moment as he said good-night, that no one in this house, evidently, had been losing sleep, "wishing on the moon." And Felicity, when her door was closed on his laughing presence, and she had heard his door close at the other end of the hall, sat down by her window looking seaward and smiled in the moonlit dark at Vincent's cheery matter-of-factness.

"I'm inclined to think he's right and I'm wrong," she told herself. "I believe he represents the big, human majority far better than I do. He's nearer sane than I am, and wholesomer. I 'moon' too much. It *was* funny—our coming in at ten o'clock on this glorious night and finding this household so far from wistfulness as to be—snoring, probably!"

And laughing softly to herself she undressed in the dark and went to bed to sleep soundly, instead of sitting by the window for hours as she so often did, wondering—always wondering.

She did not know—how could she?—that Frances had spent the evening by her window, looking out across the shining path and thinking,



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with a full heart, of The Old Man, her father; and that the little Cape Cod girl, Phemie, who had so stolidly waited on the supper table, cried herself to sleep thinking of the same moon shining on her lover with his fellows of the mackerel fleet off the Grand Banks.

CHAPTER XVII

A STAGE LOVER MAKES REAL LOVE, AND IT'S DIFFERENT

IT was not Vincent's way to lie long awake after retiring, and to-night he was deliciously drowsy hours before his usual bedtime, thanks to the sea air. But before he dozed off he reflected with amusement on his reply to Felicity's "moonshine," and the way circumstances upheld him in the dark, silent house.

"That poor girl," Vincent mused, kindly, "moons too much. She lives too much by herself. It's pretty rough, the way her few folks have been stripped from her, but land! actors are seldom long on family, and if they are, they don't see much of their folks. We have to learn to take up with the companionship we can get as we go."

That Felicity could get almost any companionship she chose, he knew. Remembering that, he could but marvel that she chose so little and that she continued to choose him so signally. Vincent was not over modest—the stage does not foster that trait—but he was fully sensible that at this

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oment there were any number of younger and a
odly number of abler men whom she might have
d under her roof-tree, to whom she might have
ured out her charming confidence on the beach
the moonlit sea. Why did she favor him?
ncent wondered. Had she a lingering sentiment
r the old ardor of the fledgling ingénue? It
ould be like her to cherish that. And there were
nes when it seemed as if she—but pshaw! Vin-
it was no “silly ass,” he told himself, thanking
eaven fervently therefor, to conclude that a
man was “after him” because she showed him
endlessness for old times’ sake. Still——

But at this point Vincent fell asleep. When he
ke, it was with an unfamiliar sense of having
e to sleep with some unsolved unpleasantness
his mind. What the deuce was it? he won-
d, as he lay blinking on a new day. He had
told he need not get up until the spirit moved
—that breakfast could be had at any time, for
saking. It was nice to visit and not have to
awake listening for a blamed bell.” But
was it that ran, like a fretful undercurrent,
h his mind, and kept dozy peace at bay?
s!

ent wished he knew what Felicity thought
im. He wanted to do the decent thing, and
ot at all certain what that was. If Felicity
lly offering him her favor—her more than

Felicity

friendly favor—he wanted to know it; for not for worlds would he embarrass her by misunderstanding her offer, let alone slighting it. No, by Jove! he'd cut his tongue out before he'd let it say a word that might send a flush of shamed affection to that lovely face. Oh, gee! he should have figured all this out before he left New York—before he sent the telegram. And he knew people were talking about them, too. A month ago he had determined to do something about it, and then—there did not seem to be anything to do. He had stayed away, and not written, except on business, till by-and-by he had almost forgotten what he was not writing for.

“Botheration!” imprecated Vincent, swinging half out of bed with a sigh for his spoiled second nap, and sitting with his feet on the floor and his head in his hands—thinking. “I wish I knew! I wish I knew about myself, and then I could walk up to her like a man and find out what *she* thinks! I'm fond of her, of course, and admire her tremendously, and it wouldn't be any hardship to try to make her happy. But would I do it if it was hard, instead of easy? Seems as if that ought to be the way a fellow could figure it out. I shouldn't want to be the cur that'd marry a woman for her money or her fame or what she could do for me; I'd rather have my self-respect than all her benefits. But how could a fellow ever feel that he'd

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married *her* for what she has? She's so charming, so—well, so much bigger than anything she's got! All the books and plays are as she says—they try to make you believe, if it's love, you'll know it for sure at first sight. I don't feel like the lovers I always play—I'm sure of that. I don't feel anything like I've felt a couple o' dozen times when I thought I was in love—and then felt sure I wasn't. I've seen a number o' women I thought I couldn't live without, but I've never seen one yet I was sure I wanted to live with—that's the trouble. It doesn't prove anything that I know I can live without Felicity Fergus—either; I've thought the other way too many times and learned it was false alarm. Then what the dickens does prove anything? How's a fellow to know? Here I've been playing love for twenty years, making a lot o' fool women crazy with the way I did it, and I don't know a bit more about the real thing than a baby. I only know I wouldn't hurt that girl's feelings for—for a mint!"

Vincent had but one thought when he went down stairs, immaculately dressed in cream flannels and looking, as he could not help knowing, very handsome: and that was to keep out of Felicity's way until he got "a better hold on this thing." This was easier than he had dared to hope, for Felicity was away, an hour ago, to the harbor, in search of freshly-caught lobsters. And when he

Felicity

had been served with breakfast by Phemie, and had exchanged a few remarks with Frances, who was busy with housewifery, he was free to do as he liked.

Mr. Allston and Adams would be down by to-night's stage, to stay over the Fourth and finish the week out, but there would be no other guests. Felicity had said something last night about getting a skipper to sail them over that afternoon to where Joe Jefferson was building his new house on the Bay. That would be pleasant. Meantime—well, he'd "go in" about eleven; till then——

He lighted a cigarette and strolled to the beach, where he found that same overturned boat in the warm sand and sat down to think things out—a most unusual occupation for impulsive Vincent, who always acted first and then, convinced that after-thinking seldom mends matters, did not think at all.

He was finding his effort arduous and without promise of fruitfulness, when a diversion presented itself in the person of a small boy, of seven, perhaps. This person had his abbreviated trousers unbuttoned at each knee and rolled half way up his diminutive thighs, which, by the whiteness of them, bespoke a brief practice of this exposure. He carried a fishing pole, which bespoke—well, a whole, lively little comedy to Vincent.

The boy was surveying Vincent with a half

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hopeful interest which he made haste to disguise when Vincent returned the scrutiny in kind.

"Hello, bub," said Vincent.

"H'lo," was the rather offish response.

"Lookin' for anybody?"

"Naw," with a fine assumption of toughness, "there's nobody to look for."

"I sympathize with you," said Vincent, gravely; "I'm in that fix myself."

"Do your folks live here?"

"No; but if they did, a fellow hardly comes to the seashore to get acquainted with his folks—eh?"

"Naw; that's what I say. Can't see what my folks wanted to come here for—ain't a fellow in miles. I just now went to the Harbor and some boys got gay with me—asked me 'f I was goin' to ketch a whale. I'd like to see them try to ride a bicycle."

"I don't suppose they ever saw a bicycle," said Vincent, with feigned contempt. The boy was delighted, but gave no sign, of course.

"You and I might go fishin' together," suggested Vincent; "you can't catch anything close to shore, except clams and crabs, but I'm thinkin' of gettin' a sailboat and a skipper to sail it, and going after bluefish—deep-sea trolling, y' know. That's the thing to do down here in the fishin' line."

"When you goin'?"

Felicity

"Well, maybe this afternoon—I don't know. Where d' you live?"

The boy indicated with his head—evidently some place further along the beach, away from the Harbor, than Fair View. "Where d' you?" he inquired.

"I'm stopping at Fair View for a few days."

"Who lives there?"

"Miss Fergus and Mrs. Allston. You don't seem to be very well acquainted 'round these parts."

"I ain't. I just come this Monday. I never been here before. I live in Peoria."

"Nice town—Peoria," observed Vincent, politely.

"Been there?"

"Yes, a lot o' times."

"I wish some o' the fellows was here," sighed the boy; "we could have a bully time."

"Not given to solitude and the pleasures of contemplation, are you?" said Vincent, whimsically.

"Sir?" said Bub, startled into politeness.

Vincent laughed. "I said, you are like me, you can't have a whalin' good time just lookin' at the sad sea waves."

"No, sir."

"Well, let's get acquainted, and see if we can't entertain each other. My name's Delano—Vincent Delano. What's yours?"

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"Mine's Bill Saunders."

"Fine! I always like fellows named Bill—don't know why, but they're usually hot sports, and I like 'em."

Bill tried not to look as pleased as he felt. To be thought "a hot sport"! Ah, that made life seem worth living in this desert by the sea.

"Say," he remarked, emboldened by Vincent's easy manner, "you talk kind o' funny. What nationality are you?" Bill had just mastered this imposing word.

"None," answered Vincent, gravely; "I'm an actor."

Now, Bill was only seven, but he was sophisticated. He knew, all things considered, a good deal about actors, and he had respect for them.

"Gee!" he exclaimed, almost deferentially. Then, "Ever acted in a circus?"

"No; but a good many years ago I was in a minstrel show."

Bill accepted the admission as a boast. "Think you'll ever get in a circus?" he pursued, anxiously.

"I don't know. I may."

"What'll you be?" eagerly.

"Well, now, Bill, I don't know. It won't be an acrobat, or a bareback rider——"

"Ner a chariot-driver?"

"I'm afraid not—nor a contortionist. I'm too stiff in the joints for any of those. But I might—

Felicity

no, I couldn't even be a clown; clowns have to tumble too much. I could feed the elephants."

Bill looked disappointed. The prospect seemed faint and not very alluring. "What d' ye act now?" he said.

Vincent tried to explain, and was hugely amused to feel himself shrinking in Bill's estimation—to know that he escaped positive contempt only because Bill did not quite understand his account of himself.

"I hoped," said Bill, "you was a funny man. I like those next to chariot-drivers and lion-tamers."

Vincent sighed that he was not, and seemed so really cast down about it that Bill tactfully changed the subject.

An hour later, when Felicity came along the beach from the Harbor, they were deep in the depredations of Captain Kidd and Lafitte, "the Black Terror."

"Bill Saunders, Miss Fergus," said Vincent, introducing his new friend.

Felicity was delighted with the swaggering name, and with Bill's evident intent to live up to it. But Bill, somehow, found Vincent less absorbing after this interruption.

Felicity had a big, covered market-basket on her arm. Setting it down, she swung off the cover to show her lobsters.

"They were all out of red ones today," she

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laughed—and went on to explain that the first time she went to the Harbor to buy lobsters she had so delighted an old lobster-fisher by asking anxiously for “red ones,” that every time he saw her thereafter he made haste to say that he had just sold out his red lobsters and had only dark ones left.

They poked at the crustaceans for a while, then Felicity proposed that Bill dig a hole in the beach and return the poor things to their native element once more before they died.

This proposition struck Bill pleasantly, and he set about the digging, in a location carefully chosen so that each wave as it rolled in would leave a little of the briny deep for the lobsters’ refreshment.

“Who’s your friend?” asked Felicity, when Bill was out of earshot.

Vincent explained.

“I didn’t know you were fond of children,” said Felicity, a little surprised.

“Me? Why, I’m crazy about ’em! Wish I had a dozen. But what’s the use? It’s not what I was cut out for, I guess. Imagine me a suburban paterfamilias, going home nights with a jug o’ molasses, a clothes-horse, a sack o’ flour and a section o’ garden hose; and getting up early in the morning to run the lawn-mower before taking my seven-fifteen to town!”

Felicity

Felicity laughed.

"Well, that's the way to raise families, and to enjoy 'em—from all I can see. And I don't fit into the scheme at all, somehow. When I meet up with a fellow like Bill, I feel kind o'—well, kind o' like I was missing a good deal. But what's the use o' feeling that way? Everybody's missing a good deal, no matter how much he's got, and everybody's just pluggin' ahead doing the best he can, notwithstanding."

"You're a good deal of a philosopher, I see," commented Felicity, and her look and tone said plainly she had not expected as much.

"Oh, hang it! Miss Fergus, even a fool has his philosophy, and there's no one so foolish as the wise man who doesn't know that. Everybody's steering by some chart he's made or adopted—and some o' the charts the plain sea-dogs make for themselves out of their experience are better 'n all the hydrographic thingumbobs in creation. Jove! that's a heavy speech for yours truly——"

"It was a good one," said Felicity, gravely; "it had a tang of The Old Man about it."

"Now I *am* 'sot up,'" laughed Vincent; "I never expected to remind you of The Old Man—except, maybe, by contrast."

"I am foolish about him," admitted Felicity, ignoring the chance for compliment; "but he made life so infinitely delightful! I resent having lost

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him before I really had sense to appreciate him. I want him now! I want him all the time! I challenge every one I meet, to see if I can't find another of his sort. But I'm afraid 'I shall not look upon his like again.' "

"Then," said Vincent, clinchingly, "why don't you stop looking? I don't believe in looking for what you can't find."

"No," she answered, deliberating, "*you* don't—but I'm not sure but that I *do*. There's something to be said for both philosophies. They're both as old as the world, I guess, and both have made men happy. There's a kind of zest in my continual expectancy that balances the satisfaction you manage to feel in what comes your way."

"Say," called Bill, "I got the hole dug, but I won't put 'em in!"

Vincent went to help him, and as Felicity watched them together, taking note of their fine comradeship, she felt a sudden yearning over this bonny man, with his admission about "missing something." It was not often one could yearn over Vincent, and she found the new sensation very sweet.

The ungracious lobsters temporarily restored to their element, Bill found the immediate prospect unpromising, so he declared his intention of going home, but softened the blow by adding that he

Felicity

would "be around this afternoon, and if you want me to go fishin', why, I will."

Vincent thanked him—Bill wasn't quite sure for what—and when he was gone explained to Felicity that if she didn't mind, he'd thought of "taking the kid along this afternoon if we went sailing. He's crazy to fish—poor youngster, with that fool perch pole!—and I thought we might troll. If we should happen to catch a bluefish, it 'd tickle him sick. But, of course, if you'd rather not be bothered, I can take him some other time."

"Why, I wouldn't miss taking him!" she cried, "I—I like boys myself, and I—I believe I like you lots better with little boys than with joss-sticks burning before you!"

There was nothing in the little, half-teasing speech, but there was everything in the tone, the look that accompanied it. Vincent forgot he had not come to any conclusion when Bill interrupted his reflections; he forgot he had ever had any reflections. Something in the expression of the brown eyes, of the sweet, sensitive mouth, moved him strangely, and before he knew what he was doing, he was pouring out disjointed sentences to Felicity—telling her he would be a glad man if he could only know she liked him a little, for any reason.

It was not a romantic environment, on the hot sands in the glare of noon, but both of them had

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played at love-making in too many fake moon-lights, by too many *papier mâché* sundials, in too many painted-muslin gardens, to care about externals.

On the stage, Vincent was a fluent lover; off the stage, his facile gallantry had never deserted him before. But today there seemed to be no words for the situation. What he felt expressed itself in murmurs, in little snatches of phrases, now halting, now hurried. There was small coherence to it, but Felicity did not care, did not know. She heard what he said far less than the tones of his voice. Nor could she find words to answer, but there was that something yielding in the quality of her silence that gave him courage to go on.

"There are—" he said, not looking at her, but delving industriously in the sand at his other side, "I hate myself for remembering them, but you know—well, you have a lot of everything, you see, and I—there isn't really anything I can offer you. I don't know why I should dare to—to ask you, you know—only you—well, you make it so easy for a fellow to forget your—your fame, and all that. I don't suppose I'm the—the kind of a man a woman like you could have a great passion for. I'm not—well, not up to you in any way. But I'm a happy sort of a fellow, and perhaps I could—could give you something, in my way. If you

Felicity

would—would take me for what I am, I'd do my best for you—Felicity! ”

Twice or thrice she essayed to speak, but found herself tongue-tied. At last, after he had stopped talking and had waited what seemed an interminable while, during which he had not once glanced at her but kept on looking, as she looked, out to sea, she laid her face upon her updrawn knees, enfolded it with her arms, and burst into tears. In an instant Vincent was holding her in his arms and crooning comfort to her.

“Oh,” she sobbed, “I've been so lonely—nobody knows how lonely! ”

“Of course you have,” he soothed, hushing her with acquiescence and with gentle patting, as if she had been a child. “You've worked too hard, and haven't had enough other interests,” he went on, his easy good humor returning to him with his command of the situation; “you've needed an every-day, easy-going chap like me to take your mind off your work and make you feel like a human being.”

“They're always crowding you,” she murmured, “you can't ever rest. There's always somebody just behind you trying to snatch your laurels. And the public always expects more and more of you. It's such hard work to keep on top; if you don't keep keyed up every minute, you lose your place.”

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"Oh, pshaw!" comforted Vincent, easily, "there's nobody within hailing distance of you—you don't need to kill yourself keeping ahead."

"If I stayed out a single season, somebody'd pass me," she insisted.

"Well! You don't want to stay out, do you? You want to stay in, and get all the fun you can out of winning."

She shook her head. "There isn't any fun in it," she declared; "when you've won, you're too tired to care."

"Then why run?" he protested.

"Because I have to! I don't know any other way, now; it's all there is in me."

"Nonsense!" said Vincent, laughing at her and shaking his head in mock despair, "don't you ever believe it! You've got more whimsies and contradictions and delusions and snares about you than would stock a whole new race o' womankind. Now, if I'm not mistaken, that horn's blowing from your front porch, and I suppose it means dinner. I asked you a—well, a rather large question, a while ago. Before we go in, would you mind giving me an answer?"

His raillery was full of embarrassment, but she was grateful for it, even though it did not deceive her.

"What more answer do you want?" she parried; "didn't I let you—hold me in your arms?"

Felicity

"You didn't let me," he retorted, "I just did it!"

"But you wouldn't have done it if you hadn't known—if I hadn't let you?"

"No," he admitted, "I wouldn't have dared to—to take any very long chances."

"Then why do you want me to—to make a formal speech of acceptance?"

Vincent was sure he had never seen anything lovelier than her blushing confusion. "I don't," he pleaded, "I just want you to take my word for it that there isn't a creature in sight—except the lobsters—and you needn't mind the speech!"

He gave her his hand and helped her to her feet. Then, with flaming cheeks and deeply conscious eyes, she wound her arms around his neck again, as on that wonderful night, so long, long ago, and raised her face to his—conscious, with all her soft embarrassment, of the difference in the thrill of that brief abandonment, but laying it to the years, and to their experience. Enchantment was for sweet sixteen; it was enough for eight-and-twenty to feel hopefulness.

"We mustn't forget the lobsters," she cautioned. And they both laughed heartily.

"Fancy the just-betrothed doing this in a play," she said, as she stooped with him over Bill's briny hole, trying to poke the lobsters back into the basket with a crooked stick.



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By tacit consent they talked shop the brief way home; it brought them there so much better fitted to face Frances nonchalantly and go about the very mundane business of eating dinner.

They had to hurry a little, so as to get an early start on their sail; and while the ladies were getting ready, Vincent went to the beach to look for Bill. He was there—with his fishing-pole!

“Come on, Sport!” called Vincent, refraining from comment on the pole.

And so Bill attached himself to the party, quite naturally, as if he belonged there, and was no more conscious than the others of his agency in the turn of affairs that morning.

CHAPTER XVIII

FAME FRIGHTENS LOVE; WANT WOOS HIM

LIKE most women, Frances took a keen interest in match-making, and she had her suspicions of something more than business—more, even, than long-founded friendship—in the relations between Felicity and Vincent. She thought these suspicions were confirmed by something in Felicity's manner that night as she introduced Vincent to Mr. Allston and Adams—by something in the look she flashed at Delano when she said, "My leading man."

But there was no occasion to invite confidence that evening. Usually, in the quiet midweek evenings of the past month, when only they two comprised the Fair View household, Felicity had come into her room at the early bedtime and, sitting there in her night-dress or lounging gown, had talked of such things as one is not likely to discuss in less intimate surroundings. But last night, though she had been awake when Felicity came in, and had lain listening for the tap on her door which was meant not to disturb her if she slept, but to

Fame Frightens Love

hail her if she did not, it never came. To-night it would not—nor the next, nor for several nights, for Herbert Allston was to stay at Fair View until Monday morning.

After supper the mail was to be had in the grocery store at the Harbor—where it was nip and tuck whether the grocer eked out a living by being also postmaster, or the postmaster supplemented a scant government income by selling groceries. The groceries took more of his time, but he liked to be called The Postmaster.

Usually, the hired boy went for the mail and for such supplies as came down by express, which the stage also carried. But to-night he had leave to attend the barbecue on the beach, three miles away, and was told that he might go early—Phemie would feed the horse, and hitch up after supper.

There was a good deal to be brought over to-night, in the way of supplies from Boston, and Felicity would, herself, drive over to the Harbor she said. "One of the gentlemen can drive over with me," she announced, in planning how they would manage. Adams volunteered, but Felicity would not hear of it.

"You three folkses want to visit, I know," she said, "so I'll ask Mr. Delano to go. We'll surely get you a letter from Morton."

"I hope so," returned Frances, anxiously. No letter had yet come to supplement his telegram of

Felicity

last Saturday. "It seems as if he'd have written on Sunday."

"Well, even so," argued Felicity, "he probably wouldn't mail it until Monday, and it couldn't get here before to-night."

"Is that a 'go,' Mater?" asked Adams, watching Vincent and Felicity drive away.

"I don't know," she answered, "sometimes I'm afraid so."

"Why 'afraid'?" He seems to be a very decent chap. Certainly he's terribly good-looking, and I must say I never saw such charming manners."

"I know," murmured Frances, "I know all that. He's a nice fellow, and I like him. But he's not her sort at all—not at all."

"Oh," observed Adams, philosophically, "you never can tell. Attraction's a queer thing, and defies all our rules for its reasonable operation. I've seen matches that promised beautifully, turn out abominably, and t'other way round just as often."

"And it's always safe to gamble on a woman, any woman, being caught by attractiveness," supplemented his father. "There never was one of them yet that married a man for his downright worth, his integrity, his responsibility, his—his character. It's always for his looks or for his charm—the way he dances or sings or does parlor tricks."

Fame Frightens Love

"So different," said Frances, abstractedly, "from the way men do. With them it's always character that counts!"

Her manner was so droll that even Herbert had to laugh.

"Poor little Sadie," she sighed, with seeming irrelevance. "I don't know why, but I'm worried about her. I wish we had a letter telling us everything's all right."

It was past nine when Vincent and Felicity got back. There was a great deal of express stuff, Felicity explained, and it took quite a while to get their packages and boxes.

"But we didn't mind waiting; it's such fun to watch the people at the store."

Her cheeks were flushed and her eyes shining as they always were with excitement, and Frances wondered whether she had learned something new in that everlasting quest of hers for the understanding of character, or if she had been learning something about herself. And would she?—Yes, Frances decided she would be true to her birthright of art even when love came to her, and would have the same interest in it she had in other people's—the interest of the analyst to know how it affected life.

But these wonderings about Felicity and her shining eyes were soon put in abeyance by the delivery of Morton's letter, which Frances tore open

Felicity

with an eagerness hardly to be accounted for even in the circumstances.

"I can't help it," she said—as if any one were blaming her—"but I have had a presentiment that things were not going to go right with Sadie, and I can't shake it off."

Alas! the letter confirmed her fears.

"Sarah Frances is a bouncing young lady," Morton wrote; "but I am distressed to say that her mother does not seem to be doing as well as the doctors think she should. There is—oh, Mater dearest, I wish you were here and could tell me about things; the doctors are so mysterious and I am so anxious I don't know whether I am too mistrustful or whether there is real danger—but there is some trouble about her eyes. Is this usual? Is it likely to be serious? I am so ignorant, and so distressed."

"Poor darling!" said Frances, wiping her eyes; and though she did not designate, they knew it was her boy she meant—her eldest-born, wrestling alone with unknown terrors by the side of the girl he had sworn to cherish.

After a few moments of sympathetic condolence, Felicity slipped away to put her fruit and vegetables on the ice and to see about getting the horse stabled. Vincent followed her. Phemie and the cook were abed—folk of these parts went to bed with the birds, it seemed—and these two

Fame Frightens Love

children of the road were delighted with the stillness of the big kitchen, lighted only by the moon-rays until Felicity, groping, found a lamp.

Before she lighted it, though, Vincent laid down his burden of goods for the ice-box and caught her to him in a boyishly ardent embrace.

"Look out for the lamp!" she cried.

"Oh, the lamp and the lobsters!" he protested, "and our manners to the company, and—and all sorts of things! Put the lamp down, Felicity Fergus, and tell me you're happy to-night."

Without releasing her he led her toward the kitchen table so she could free herself of the lamp. Then, held close against him, she wound her arms about his neck with a fervor of clinging, and laid her face against his, drooped to meet it.

"Vincent, dear," she whispered, "I feel almost guilty—I'm so glad to get away from those dear people and their sad anxiety. I feel as if I wanted to flee away from all the sadness in the world and just be happy with you. You'll help me to be happy, won't you? I've been sad so much, and worked so hard, and happy is the one thing I've never been. You're going to teach me to be happy, aren't you? You won't let me be sad any more? People seem to think I have so much because I have fame and money and all that. But I always feel there isn't anybody alive who needs so much as I do—not the things I've got, but the things that

Felicity

—that elude me. Sometimes I say to myself that I've got everything in the world that I don't want! But that's because I'm so lonesome. It's going to be different, now—isn't it? You won't let me be lonesome any more?"

Vincent was awed by the passion of her low-toned plea. Also, he was intoxicated by the sweetness of her, clinging to him in that lovely supplication. It did not seem possible he could ever have had any doubt about wanting her; for now that she was his he had an almost fierce joy in the possession of her. Why, what he had recoiled from was the chance of being that unmanned thing, a consort to a wife who had need of nothing he could give her; and here was the wonderfully different reality, this exquisite "child within his arms" crying out to him for her happiness. Nothing in his life before had ever so moved him, and his voice was choked with feeling as he replied to her:

"God help me, darling—I will! I was afraid I hadn't much to offer you, but you—oh, you make me so happy. I've played at love these many years, but I never knew there was anything in it like this—anything that could make a man feel like I feel now."

After they had lit the lamp and safely bestowed the perishables, Felicity constituted herself a "Liberty enlightening the world," as she said, and held aloft her little beacon for Vincent while he un-

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hitched the horse; there was nothing about horses that Vincent did not know and delight in.

When they rejoined the Allstons, sitting on the porch overlooking the sea, Felicity announced her engagement.

"Dear people," she said, timidly, tremulously, "I want to invite you all to my wedding. I hope to marry Mr. Delano in New York, early in September—in my new house, if I have one. But please keep it very 'dark.' I want it to be as quiet as possible."

The next few days were quiet ones. The Allstons tried not to be depressed about Morton, but they could hardly be very gay, remembering his anxiety. There was, however, no occasion for gayety. It was tacitly understood that Vincent and Felicity wanted a good deal of each other's exclusive society, and the Allstons tactfully made this possible for their hostess. To offset it—that Felicity might not feel conscious of her absorption in one guest—the whole party sailed every day for several hours, the men fishing, sometimes (with Bill for companion), and sometimes taking a hand at the tiller under a swart sea-dog's guidance. They drove often, too, and went each morning for a dip in the surf and a sunning on the beach. Beyond these things there was really nothing to do. On the Fourth there had been a clambake in a grove

Felicity

some miles away, and they had all gone. On another day, their sail took them once more to Mr. Jefferson's new home. But these were the only "events" that marked the days.

Felicity was wonderfully content. She seemed to have lost all that anxiousness about her work, her life, for the coming season, which had fretted her so, and to look forward radiantly to the future. Everything in her prospect was changed by the promise of Vincent's joyous presence. And as this mood intensified, she grew more and more bewitching to Vincent, who marvelled that he could ever have stood hesitant outside this happiness. He was intoxicated with the charm of her as revealed to him in their new relationship—with the sweetness of her dependence on him; with the magic of her smile; with the ardor she showed to be happy as he was happy, with what the moment brought; with the thrill of her touch, the caress of her hands on his brow, the clinging of her arms about his neck.

Monday morning, early, the Allston men were to take the stage for Fall River. A second letter from Morton, received Saturday night, was no less disquieting than the first, and all day Sunday, although they said little about it except in strictly family conference, the three Allstons sat in the shadow of this thing that impended over Morton. The men were inclined to think, hopefully, that

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Sadie's blindness was a merely temporary feature of that crucial experience of womankind which, in their idea of it, might easily comprehend all known terrors, since it comprehended so many, and allow recovery from all, since it allowed recovery from some so grave. But Frances knew better, and her anxiety communicated at last to them, and the three sat talking in hushed tones of what poor Morton would do if this awful thing came to pass.

Felicity knew what they must be feeling, and shunned them as much as she could.

The day was a very warm one, and every one in the Fair View household spent the torrid part of the mid-afternoon in an attempt, at least, at a siesta. About five o'clock, Felicity came down stairs, wearing a simple little white gown of softest India linen, cut slightly low at the neck and showing the loveliness of her throat so alluringly that Vincent, who was waiting for her in a shady corner of the porch, stooped, when he rose to greet her, and kissed her where the line of beauty began to curve upward toward her chin. He was doubly rewarded for this little bit of lover's daring, by the exquisite flush which mounted to her very hair, and by the sweet consciousness in her eyes.

"Felicity," he whispered, holding her close to him for a passionate moment, "you are certainly the loveliest thing alive! And what keeps me

Felicity

astounded is, I never knew you were—were like this, until—well, just recently, just since I came down here. I've always thought you were beautiful and fascinating, and all that, but I—I could think quite calmly about you. You've never been the kind of woman—thank God!—that sets every man crazy, and I never dreamed, any more than the rest did, I suppose, what you could be to a man if you loved him."

They left the house and wandered toward the beach—aimless as to direction or distance, conscious only of a desire to be by themselves, safe from interruption. Vincent had no compunctions about this, so long as they were polite about it. But Felicity felt she ought to give more of herself to the Allstons—more sympathy and more effort to divert them.

"Vincent, dear," she said, as they strolled Harbor-wards, "I feel guilty about the Allstons. I feel as if I had almost shunned them since they have been feeling so sad and I have been feeling so glad. But, oh! dear, I've been sad so much, and I want to be happy now. Nobody ever wanted to be happy as much as I do! You keep me from thinking about sad things; when I'm with you I remember only the happiness of the moment. I don't want to be selfish—but I guess happiness always makes people selfish——"

"Felicity," he said, and there was a roughness

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in his voice which she knew was not for her, but for the things that harassed her, "you listen to me, dear girl: You owe yourself happiness; you owe it to the public that delights in you. The world likes happy people, needs happy people. There are too many folks snuffling through this vale of tears. Now, you make up your mind to be happy. Stop looking back like Mrs. What's-her-name, that turned to a pillar of salt. Good idea!—that of the salt; I never thought of it before, but I see now it was the logical outcome for a woman who wept too much over things she couldn't help and ought to have left behind!"

Monday morning, after the stage left, Vincent began to grow restless, and by Tuesday night was possessed of but one desire: to get away from West Harbor Point and take Felicity with him. There was nothing to do there, and a week at a time of doing nothing was enough. And with all his philosophy of her debt to herself and to her public, he had difficulty in persuading Felicity to leave Frances much alone, and difficulty in making her believe she was happy when she did it.

Mr. Leffler had written twice urging her to run up to New York for a day or two and look at houses, and Vincent felt convinced that was the thing for her to do. He would get her to town and absorbed in house-furnishing. And even in

Felicity

July there was plenty to do in New York for recreation, when one tired of shopping.

Accordingly, he proposed that they go by Friday morning's stage, and catch the one o'clock train from Boston. That would get them to New York in time for dinner and afterwards they could slip up to the Casino and sit a while on the roof garden. Then, Saturday afternoon they could go to Manhattan Beach, where Gilmore played and Pain's fireworks illumined the destruction of something-or-other, and—oh, the very thought of it all made him homesick.

But Felicity needed to be coaxed into the notion, and then coaxed into believing she could go and leave Frances. She was happy here, with Vincent—much happier, her heart told her, than she would be in New York. Then, she had no quarters there, no maid—she had let Celeste go home to the Exposition, on full pay—no companion, no anything. She would go up some day in midweek and take Frances with her, but she could not go and leave her guest alone for days, especially now, when she was so anxious about poor Sadie. Why couldn't Vincent stay quietly there? He needed the rest, and so did she, and they would probably never have another such opportunity together. Their honeymoon would have to be full of hard work. Ahead of them stretched long weeks of excitement, of constant change and flurry.

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It was so sweet here, the sweetest time Felicity had ever known. Why couldn't Vincent be content?

Vincent couldn't, though. He fretted, and his fretting spoiled her peace. In her dilemma—feeling she must go and wondering how she should accomplish it—she appealed to Frances and had with her, one day when Vincent had gone fishing with Bill, their first real, confidential talk since Vincent's coming.

They were sewing on the side porch away from the morning sun. "It looks," said Felicity, with fine appearance of being casual, "as if I'd have to run up to New York for a few days. I have to look at houses and see about furnishings, and cable over for a lot of French trousseau stuff, and do a heap o' things. This deciding to get married," she explained, with pretty confusion, "changes the outlook a good deal for me."

Yes, Frances could readily see that it must. Also, it was no secret to her, though she said nothing about it, that Vincent was restless and, doubtless, urging Felicity away. Frances wondered at Felicity a good deal, of late. But she urged her to go, of course, saying she should not mind being alone.

But, no! Felicity would not hear to her being alone. She must have some one here to visit her for a week. Frances did not want any one to visit

Felicity

her for a week; she did not feel like entertaining any one and would far rather have been alone, when her men-folks were not there. But she saw that only on the terms that satisfied her would Felicity rest content, and so promised to think up some woman friend who would be likely to make hurried preparations and rush to her on short notice. Frances smiled, with all her secret annoyance, to think how her father would have loved the humanness of this situation, how whimsically conscious he would have been of the times he had done a like thing.

"Then," said Felicity, feeling, somehow, not quite satisfied, "I've been thinking that probably, when Morton's wife gets a little stronger, he'll want to take her away from sweltering Chicago for a change. And I want you to offer them Fair View for as long as they'll stay here, with you and me. Probably a month by the sea will quite restore poor little Sadie."

Frances was grateful for this offer, really grateful, though she was shrewdly aware to what she owed it, in part at least. She would write Morton today, she said, and whether they could come or not, she knew how they would appreciate the invitation.

"Then I must wire Mr. Leffler today to hire hotel quarters for me and to engage me a maid for a week."

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"Will Mr. Delano come back with you?" asked Frances.

Felicity did not know. "He may," she said, "or he may run up to Saratoga or somewhere else where it's livelier. We're a bit slow, down here, for Vincent. He's been used to so much that's rip-roaring, all his life, that he can't adjust himself to our quiet."

"But you don't tire of it?"

"No, I don't. I love it."

"Being used to the quiet life, eh?"

Felicity laughed. "Well, some folks like quiet for a change, and some don't. The Old Man didn't, you know. *He* wouldn't have stayed here a week without getting restless!"

Frances wondered if Felicity saw no difference between her father's restlessness and Vincent Delano's. She even resented the coupling of their names in this way. Vincent was a nice enough fellow, but it was a kind of blasphemy to draw any parallel between him and that Old Man who enriched life so infinitely for all who knew him. Frances was so accustomed to thinking of her father and to hearing him spoken of as "a man, take him for all in all, I shall not look upon his like again," that Adams said she could never hear Hamlet so describe his father to Horatio without feeling that he plagiarized her sentiments.

Felicity

"Father's restlessness was—different," she said, a little stiffly.

Felicity's eyes filled. "Oh, don't I know it!" she cried, and her voice had a quaver in it. She laid down her sewing, went over to Frances and, sitting on the porch step at her feet, laid her head in the elder woman's lap.

"I haven't any mother," she said, plaintively, "nor Aunt Elie, nor a soul to talk to about the biggest step in my life. If The Old Man were here I'd talk to him soonest of all, but he isn't—not as I want him, all alive. Some of the things he said are a help to me now, as things he said nearly always come to me to help me when I need him. But I feel as if I'd never wanted him as I do now. I don't know whether you can understand, but perhaps you can. You see, I've been so lonesome——"

"Yes, I can understand that."

"And I—I guess I'm queer; I've led a queer life. I fell in love with Vincent, in a silly, little, sighing-sixteen way, when I was just a child; and while I don't imagine, now, it was real love, or anything like it, I thought it was, then, and there was something about the sentimentality of it that seemed to fill my need and keep me from hunting other vents while I slaved at my profession. I wonder if you understand me now? If you can see how I don't make light of that fancied love

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of mine? Next to The Old Man and to Aunt Elie's devotion, I feel I owe it more than I owe anything else in the world. I didn't know anything about Vincent in those days; I thought of him as a kind of god. But I know enough, now, to know that that isn't so foolish as it sounds. Real love is just as subjective, I guess—has just as little to do with the loveliness of the object and everything to do with the subject's need of loving. I used to sleep with Vincent's picture and letters under my pillow—when I had a pillow!—and carry them inside my dress by day. When my ardor to be a great actress lagged—and I tell you, it took imagination, in those days, to believe in greatness, to believe that it existed anywhere, let alone for me; if I hadn't known The Old Man I'd have lost my belief, I'm sure—but when my ardor lagged, as I say—and not even The Old Man's hope for me was enough to keep it from faintness—I could always whip it up with remembering Vincent. When I began to stoop a little, and Aunt Elie was terrified for fear I'd get round-shouldered, I drew up a kind of solemn, secret document, swearing to 'strive for a beautiful form for *his* sake,' and wore it in a little bag tied round my neck. Oh, they were delicious years, those, with all their toil and privations and heartbreaks, and their rosy, rosy dreams! Often, I think I'd give all I've got to go back and live them over again.

Felicity

But I couldn't—not if I had all the world to give—and I suppose I wouldn't," she said, smiling, "if it came to a test. There never could be any test, though," she went on, reflectively, "because, even if I could give up all that success has brought to me, I couldn't give up with it my knowledge of how little success satisfies. And so the working and the dreaming could never be the same again, because I could never imagine again that the thing I was dreaming of and working for would make me happy when I had it. Oh, the beautiful, beautiful years when I believed that happiness lay just ahead! And always Vincent was not only in it, but the cause of it. I said I must be great for his sake. I never suspected, though I'd often heard The Old Man say so, that no man ever loved a woman for her fame or her achievements—that love can't be bought even by honest worth, but comes oftenest to succor, never to batten on success. I know, now! I know that my fame has cost me love, instead of bringing it to me."

Frances was so astonished at this admission that a little gasp of surprise escaped her. Felicity looked up into her face and smiled, through her tears.

"Oh, you didn't understand!" she cried, "I knew you couldn't. Nobody could, except The Old Man! He'd know! He said it was sheer churlishness to refuse everything because you can't

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have what you want most. He said great spirits never had what they wanted—that they wouldn't have been great spirits if they could *get* what they wanted!—and that they always did the best they could with what Fate allowed them. He said the world is full o' folks doing the best they can—not what they want to do, but what they can—and that he wouldn't wish to live unless he could know he belonged to that valorous army! He—oh, he would have understood me if I'd confessed to him that I don't think Vincent is a god—any more. He wouldn't be shocked because I'm not blind with love, not expecting perfect happiness—but just lonely, intolerably lonely, and tired of my awful wishfulness. I'm fond of Vincent, very fond of him, a little for what he is—for his care-freeness, his joy in living, his personal charm—and a great deal for what he has been to me. I love him for what the ideal of him was to that girl I used to be! More of my tenderest recollections are bound up with him than with anybody else alive. I couldn't begin now, with my sad world-wisdom, to build about a demigod such visions as I built about Vincent long ago. And no other man has ever appealed to me for a moment. I've dreamed of another, dreamed a good deal more than was good for me of a possible man who might come into my life and irradiate it, with understanding of me and wisdom far

Felicity

beyond mine, as The Old Man irradiated my youth, as the memory of him irradiates every day I live. But no man I ever saw seemed the least likely to do this, and I've needed companionship so, I think perhaps I've been wrong to hold out for it on my own terms—that I ought to take it, and be grateful for it, on the terms Fate offers me. I thought of this the other morning, when Vincent said what he did about Bill—about everybody missing something as he missed having a boy like Bill, but everybody doing the best he can, notwithstanding. Somehow, I loved Vincent for that admission as I'd never loved the real Vincent before, and when he asked me to marry him, I said I would, and determined to be as happy as circumstance allows. Tell me you're not shocked," she pleaded, searching Frances' face for understanding sympathy. "I know this isn't what they call love in the books and plays, but as nearly as I can make out it's what most people have to make shift with."

"I think it is," said Frances, quietly—almost to herself, or to a confessor, and not to a questioner—and yet with that in her voice which told Felicity all she wanted to know about this one other woman, at least.

It seemed to do Felicity a world of good to free her mind in this way. Things looked less involved when one could talk about them, and everybody

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knows it is easier to plead for one's self before the most difficult second person than before that *alter ego* at whose bar we are always trying our case.

Frances wondered, as she listened, if Felicity had no sense of being married for her money, her fame, for what she could give. But that preying distrust of small minds had never fastened itself upon Felicity Fergus. She had not even—so absorbed was she in analyzing her own attitude toward this thing she was about to do—reflected on what people in general would probably say of it. Frances knew the interpretation many would put on Vincent's initiative; she could hardly conjecture what they would say of Felicity's acquiescence.

"Have you told him all this?" she asked, nodding toward Vincent, who, with Bill by his side, was waving to them from the beach.

"Mercy, no!" laughed Felicity, "Vincent's not a hair-splitting person; he wouldn't understand."

CHAPTER XIX

"THE OTHER SIDE OF SUCCESS"

"**I** DON'T suppose you've changed your mind about going to Mt. Auburn?"

Felicity had opened the door of her husband's room ever so softly and, finding him awake, put her question. It was Decoration Day, the spring after her marriage, and they were playing in Boston. The Old Man lay at rest in Mt. Auburn, and the night before Felicity had announced her intention of going over in the morning, before the crowds got there, to decorate his grave; and had asked Vincent to go with her.

"Oh, Felicity," he had pleaded, remonstrant, "why do you think up such uncomfortable things to do? You know I'm not keen about graveyards at any time, and at ten in the morning, dearest, I couldn't get up a reverent thought for any one that ever lived."

This morning when she opened his door and found him awake, he made haste to bury his head in a pillow and simulate such sound-asleepness as would have done credit to Rip Van Winkle. Felicity went to him and shook him by the shoulder.

"Aren't you ashamed?" she said—proper

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reproach lost in the laughter his comically elaborate feint inspired.

"Aren't *you* ashamed?" he retaliated, "coming in here and waking me out of my beauty sleep!"

"You weren't asleep!"

"I was just trying to get to sleep. Why, it's no more than a decent bedtime; I'm just in."

"It's nine o'clock; you came in at half-past three—I heard you."

Vincent abandoned his feint. "You lie awake half the night," he charged, "and yet, when I want you to stay out after the show, you say you're tired and must get your rest."

It was an old controversy now, and Felicity always avoided it if she could. She leaned over and kissed him by way of silencing, and Vincent reached an arm around her and drew her to him in a fervor of fondness she seldom failed to excite in him, when he was with her.

"It's a glorious morning," she said, suggestively.

"It was a bully evening," he answered, laughing.

"At Bullfinch Place?"

"Yes. Fine crowd out last night. Never sat at a livelier table."

"Well, I'm glad you had a nice time," she said, without irony.

"And I hope you'll have a nice time at your

Felicity

graveyard," he returned. "I'd go with you, dearest, if it wasn't so beastly early—much as I dislike burying-grounds. But you wouldn't enjoy my company if I did go. I'm not charming at nine in the morning—it may be hard to believe, but I'm not, really. I'm much more myself at three—but at three you're never up to see me. Why," delightedly, as this whimsicality shaped itself in his mind, "you'll live and die, my darling, and never know how much you might have thought of me if you hadn't insisted on sleeping when I'm just waked up, and waking when I've just gone to sleep. You have no idea the funny things I can think of at 2 A.M.—the witty anecdotes I'm reminded of, the—the general, all-round delightfulness of me when the milk carts begin to rattle by!"

"Owl!" she chided, shaking her head.

"Lark!" he retorted, gayly, adding: "I do think, though, you might have called me a nightingale. It would have been so much more—well, polite—not to say truthful!"

There was no use pleading with Vincent, and less use getting out of patience with him. Vincent was—Vincent! One could not blame him for being himself—least of all could Felicity, who had married him knowing full well what he was, and who was too honest with herself and with him to reproach him for not changing when she had declared she did not expect him to change.

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So she kissed him again and left him to his "beauty sleep," avowing that nothing could induce her to interfere with what he needed so much.

"By Jove, dearest!" he told her, "it's evident enough that nobody ever interfered with yours. You look like a flower, this minute—like a June rose."

"June roses aren't pretty yet—it's only May," she called back to him as she left. But the compliment pleased her. Vincent always had a way of retrieving his deficiencies with his charm.

When Felicity had breakfasted and gone downstairs, she debated for a few moments as to whether she would get a carriage or go out to Mt. Auburn by the Cambridge car that passed the door of the hotel and took one to the cemetery gate. The carriage would be a nuisance while she was wandering from place to place, so she decided in favor of the car and, emerging from the Parker House with her big box of flowers, she took up her stand on the curb across Tremont Street and waited for her car.

She was quite at home in the beautiful cemetery; it had been a favorite loitering place of The Old Man's in the long ago days when few of the illustrious that later made it a pilgrims' shrine were numbered with the great majority. She had gone with him many times to Charlotte Cushman's grave, had climbed with him to the slope whereon lay Booth's dear Mary Devlin, had stood before

Felicity

the stone memorial to poor, drowned Margaret Fuller.

They had stopped sometimes on these visits at Craigie House and at Elmwood. Once, during one of Felicity's vacations from "the frontier," they had spent a day at Concord and gone to Sleepy Hollow where Hawthorne and Thoreau and Emerson and other great men lie; and it had been a charming day, but not like other days in Père la Chaise and Kensal Green and the Protestant Cemetery at Rome, and the unkempt churchyard at Edmonton. The great men of letters in New England's glory time were seceders, all, from the grim Puritanism that had held their fathers thrall, but they were not much given to association with actor-folk. The Old Man had never known them well, as he had known Washington Irving and poor, wild Edgar Poe and men of another sort than the sage of Concord and "the white Mr. Longfellow"; had never known any of them as he knew Charles Dickens, and Thackeray, and Balzac, and George Sand—none at all as he knew the Kembles and the Keans and the Jeffersons and his fellows of the road.

But he had always loved Mt. Auburn and had chosen the sunny slope where he wanted to lie. Felicity came here a great deal, when she was in Boston. Everything about it appealed to her—the quiet, the beauty, the sacredness of association

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with that memory which, as she said, irradiated her life.

This morning it was glorious in the golden sunlight; the wine-sweet air of May was intoxicating, and the full-throated choristers of the feathered choir were carolling as if the brilliance and the fragrance had gone to their heads and made them mad—mad with the joy of living. Flags fluttered on a multitude of graves holding soldier dead; flowers were everywhere. The vivid fresh greens of spring had not yet taken on any of the tones of summer. In this city of the dead, even on Memorial Day, it was hard to think of anything but Life, but promise, but the constant renewal of vigor that the old world sees.

On her way to The Old Man's grave Felicity passed Mary Booth's and here, if she had flowers, she always stopped to leave a few, for love of the great tragedian whose heart had broken when this girl-wife was buried here.

This morning as she neared the Booth plot she saw a woman there, and was about to pass without stopping when the woman rose and she saw it was Clorinda Detmar.

Clorinda was playing a small part in Felicity's company that season, and thereby hung a tale. For when Felicity had gone to New York in July, at Vincent's urging, part of her reluctance to go had been—though she but half confessed it to

Felicity

herself—on account of Clorinda. That newspaper account of the restaurant row had not been forgotten when Felicity promised to marry Vincent—it was only one of the things she had chosen to overlook. When he grew restless for New York she had flinched before what she felt sure was coming. There was a great deal in New York for Vincent and she could not hope, even in the first flush of their engagement, to be more than a considerable part of it. He might always think her the most charming of women—but he would always be interested, too, in other kinds of charm; Felicity knew too much about human nature not to know that. But this Clo Detmar? Somehow, though she thought she had reconciled herself to Vincent's other fancies in general, she found herself balking at this first experience in particular. She would have been glad to keep him isolate by the sea all that brief summer if she could. But she could not. And it was mere chance that threw Clorinda across their path at Manhattan Beach one night and made the whole story clear to Felicity, who, in her unconfessed gratefulness to have Vincent put in this heroic light, declared her wish to give Clorinda a place in her company if she desired it—which, of course, Clorinda did, as she was very nigh desperation.

“It's sheer nonsense for me,” Felicity had told herself that night before she went to sleep, “to

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begin being afraid of Vincent *now*! If he's going to stray, he'll stray; I can't keep him, if I lock him in a safe! I'll give that poor girl another chance, and if Vincent shows himself faithless—why, he'd have done it anyway, no doubt."

But Vincent did not, and Felicity, who felt herself a very philosophical person indeed, grew quite interested in Clorinda—what little she saw of her. It was a surprise, though, to find her here.

"You, here!" she exclaimed, as she recognized Clorinda.

"My mother's buried in Mt. Auburn," Clorinda explained, "and when I'm here I always come to this grave, too, and lay a flower on it for *his* sake. He's a saint!" she cried, with sudden passion. "I played in his company during the worst of my trouble—only little parts—I was nobody and he was the greatest living—but he was so sweet and kind to me!"

"He's sweet and kind to everybody," said Felicity, "I love him, too, and always come here for his sake."

So, talking of Booth in the ardor of affection with which his fellow-players always speak of him, they came away, leaving, each, her little tribute to him on the grave of the woman he loved.

Felicity would rather have gone alone to The Old Man's, but when Clorinda said she was bound thither, too, Felicity had not the heart to regret

Felicity

her company. She knew how The Old Man would have liked being remembered with affection by this poor, ill-used girl who had once played a minor part with him. Clorinda had brought a blossom or two for him also, and she laid them with the wealth of bloom Felicity had brought.

"I'm so glad to see you do that!" Felicity said, with enthusiasm. "I'm so jealous of his fame that I can't understand how any man, woman, or child can come in here and not bring a flower for him. They must all—not the children, perhaps, but all the men and women—have got more joy out of living because he lived; he must have made them smile many a time when their hearts were heavy. I almost hate them for seeming to forget it!"

"People forget all their debts," said Clorinda, bitterly, "everything except their grievances."

Then it flashed on Felicity how The Old Man, had he been here, would never have let poor Clorinda go back to her lonely struggle again without trying, in his sweet, whimsical, wise way, to give her a kindlier opinion of the human family. That was his great gift—if it were possible to differentiate among so many—one always came away from him with a better feeling for "folks," as he loved to call them. "Folks is folks," he had been wont to say, "more alike than the unwise person suspects. Don't you go charging any sins against the human family that you're not willing

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to own up to having yourself, for there's none of us peculiar unless there's something wrong about him. If we're all right, we're pretty much like the rest o' folks.”

Felicity remembered this now, and checked on her very lips an answer to Clorinda's bitter charge. How to contradict it, though, with anything like the uncensorious wisdom of The Old Man!

Like most unfortunate people, Clorinda was defiant. She carried always with her that little air which holds at bay a great deal of kindness along with the pity it is assumed against. Felicity felt this in her every encounter with Clorinda, and was none too patient with it. She would have been amazed and indignant could she have known how she, more than almost anybody else in the world, excited this bridling in Clorinda.

“I don't know,” she began, a little primly, for all her good intentions, “perhaps we oughtn't to blame them. People are pretty kind, pretty faithful. Look around you! Every grave, almost, tells a story of loving remembrance.”

“Oh,” retorted Clorinda, lapsing into coarseness of tone and manner with the sudden flaming of her always-smouldering grievance, “you can talk! you're on the top of everything; what do you know about people? They all scrape and bow down to you. Wait till you've asked favors of them!”

Felicity

There was a note of vindictive prophecy in her voice, as if she foresaw the inevitableness of Felicity's bitter knowledge, and rejoiced in it. Felicity looked at her, across The Old Man's grave, in astonishment; Clorinda met the look defiantly, and a deep red began to burn in Felicity's cheeks.

"You—you don't like me," she said, slowly, feeling it a charge and suggesting as much by her manner.

Clorinda looked as if she could have flashed back an immediate assent to the charge, but was mindful of Felicity's grasp on the purse-strings of her present comfort, and forbore. She laughed, the mirthless laugh of one who seeks to gain time for making up a doubtful mind. Then the accusation in Felicity's manner outweighed all considerations of prudence and she replied:

"I don't. Why should I?"

Felicity gasped under the frank brutality of Clorinda's bearing. "I've never injured you," she said, "I've done you every kindness I could. Why should you dislike me?"

"Well, to be honest with you—which hardly any one is, I guess—it's your success I don't like, I suppose. We never like success—we who haven't got it. We may pretend friendship for fortunate people, but we're always tickled sick to see 'em tumble. Why should I like you? You have everything; I have nothing. 'Tain't fair!"

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“Clorinda Detmar,” said Felicity, after a moment’s pause, “is it possible you haven’t any better sense than that? Can you, a grown woman, with some experience of life, be so foolish as not to know that things are evened up pretty well, somehow? Do you suppose I don’t pay dear for everything I get? And don’t you ever suspect that when I’ve got it, I’m so exhausted with paying the price that I can’t enjoy the purchase? More than half the time I hate the things I can’t stop striving for—didn’t you ever guess that?”

“No, I never did; nobody ever does, that I know of, and nobody’ll ever believe you do, not if you swear to it. You’re quick to tell us that are down an’ out that the things you have aren’t worth anything. But you never offer us the chance to find out for ourselves whether we like those things or not; you expect us to take your word for it—and let you keep the soft things!”

What use to ask poor, impassioned Clorinda how it might be possible for Felicity to hand over to her for a trial of its benefits that eminence to which years of incredible toil had brought her? What use to reply at all to such an outburst? It was a bitterness as old as the world, as old as the hate that inspired the first murder. But the injustice of it!

Silence fell between these two women so unable to make themselves clear to one another.

Felicity

Then Clorinda said, with a harsh, forced little laugh:

"I s'pose I'm as good as fired for my frankness."

Felicity looked at her, first in surprise, then in contempt. "That also shows," she said, proudly, "how little you understand me."

Clorinda turned to go. Felicity's manner, intimating that it was of not the least consequence to her whether Clo Detmar liked or disliked her, nettled the unfortunate woman more than anything else could have done. "You think I'm queer," she said, "but I'm not; there are heaps of people like me."

It was a chance remark, intended as a parting shot, not of vindication—Clo did not care, especially, to vindicate herself—but of irritation; something to rankle after she was gone, and disturb this Felicity Fergus for a long time to come. But it shot straight to a mark Clo never dreamed of, and immediately Felicity's personal interest merged in her passionate general interest, her understanding of character.

It was of trifling moment, anyway, what this particular woman thought of her as a particular woman. But Clo had never seen anything like the avidity with which Felicity took her up on that declaration of there being "heaps of people" like her in the hatred of success. Felicity had

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worked slavishly hard for her success, had sacrificed much for it, but she had never been balked in her pursuit of it and had never learned in personal disappointment this destructive envy of the successful.

"Do you really believe," she asked, with an eagerness which almost surprised Clo out of her animosity for the moment, "that—that a lot of people I've never harmed, never known, would be glad if misfortune overtook me?"

Clo laughed. "Why, sure! Don't you know that yourself?"

"No, I didn't know; I suppose I should, but I didn't. I never have felt that way. I've always known successful people, and liked them; it never occurred to me to hate any of them for their success—to grudge success to any one, even if I didn't like them. Why," with a weary little laugh, "sometimes I feel so about success that I wouldn't wish it for my dearest foe! I've always seen so much of the other side of it, the tragedy of it, that I can't see how anybody can feel about it the way you say you do. Haven't you read about it? Don't you know it's all a story of heart-break?"

"I guess all life is heart-break, all right," said Clorinda, slowly, with not a trace of the passion of a moment ago, "but," suddenly resentful again, "some of you have the pleasure of triumph along

Felicity

with the pain that's common to us all. And some of us have only the pain—nothing else! ”

To this, Felicity had nothing to say. It was so true, and then again, in a way she could never hope to make plain to Clo, it was not true at all. In the pause that followed, Clo stooped and rearranged two or three long-stemmed carnations among the flowering myrtle on The Old Man's grave. Watching her, something flashed into Felicity's mind.

“ You didn't hate him for his success,” she said.

“ No.”

“ Why not? ”

Felicity's eagerness made her seem so insistent that Clorinda showed a disinclination to be quizzed. Felicity read it quickly.

“ Please! ” she entreated. “ I don't mean to be impertinent, to pry into your feelings, but I want to know so much! You don't know,” she said, coming round to the same side of the grave with Clo and laying a beseeching hand on her arm, “ how much you could do for me if you would! ”

Clo could not help looking the astonishment she felt.

“ Indeed you could,” Felicity reiterated. “ You think the world's a lonely place for people who don't succeed, but I tell you it's a far lonelier

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place for people who do! You think people hold aloof from you because you've been unfortunate. I tell you they hold more aloof from me because I'm what they call fortunate! No! don't look incredulous—it's so! You don't know how I loathe people, most of the time, for their everlasting consciousness of my success. I don't want their adulation—I'm cloyed with adulation—I want their comradeship. Now, tell me, Clo Detmar—woman to woman—why you didn't grudge him his triumphs.” She bent her head, indicating where The Old Man lay.

Clo was silent for a few moments, but Felicity knew it was the silence not of sullenness, but of reflection. “Well,” she said, presently, “I don't know's I've ever figured the thing out in any way that'd suit you, but maybe it was because—I can't exactly describe it, but because he was a man, for one thing, and it didn't seem as if he was cutting in on any of the things I'd hoped to have for myself. A good many o' the men of his profession had it in for him, I guess. They started neck and neck with him, and ran even for a while, and then he passed 'em, running like the wind, and all the world yelled for him, while they were nothing but 'also rans'—and they thought they were just as good actors, or better. Yes, the men, especially the comedy men, had it in for him, all right—not openly, you know, but

Felicity

there was a lot o' them that couldn't help being glad when he got a poor play, or a good roast. And then, people get tired of hearing another person praised, always praised, and even if they've never seen you, they get a kind o' grudge against you."

"Aristides the Just," murmured Felicity.

"Who?"

She explained.

"The world's always been pretty much the same, hasn't it?" said Clo, delighted with the idea.

"And then," she went on, when Felicity had assented, "I think some people's success doesn't rankle like others' because you know they're sad, and you feel sorry for them. When I was a real young girl I played in Miss Cushman's company, and I didn't envy her, nor grudge her all she got, because I knew how she suffered from that cancer that was killing her—eating into her breast like fire. When the audiences applauded her, I was glad; they could never go wild enough to suit me, I was so sorry for her, she was so plucky! But you! There's something about your success that makes me feel it's unjust for one woman to have so much. You seem to have—well, to have got my share, too, somehow, and a lot o' other women's share, and I keep crying inside o' me that it ain't fair. Maybe you've got your troubles, too, like

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the rest of us; but we can't see 'em, and so we can't be sorry for you."

Felicity was about to reply when she gave, instead, a glad little recognizing cry and in an instant was running forward with welcoming hands outstretched.

"Oh, oh, oh!" she murmured in staccato ecstasy, holding one hand of Frances Allston's and one of Morton's, "I never dared to hope for this! You didn't answer my letter," addressing Frances, "and I gave up all idea of having you."

"Letter?" Frances looked blank. "Did you write?"

"I certainly did—on Monday."

"I never got it."

"You didn't!"

And then a light broke upon Felicity. She clapped her hand to her mouth and rolled her eyes in a grimace so deliciously like her childhood that these two who had known her in that childhood, laughed. They understood, without a word, what had happened. Felicity seemed not at all provoked, but highly amused.

"Could anything be more beautifully commonplace?" she cried, gayly. "Oh, I'm delighted—now that it's all turned out so well. I feel that I've had another universal experience—that I'm married for sure, now, when I've given my husband a letter to mail, and he hasn't mailed it!"

Felicity

She introduced Clorinda, and explanations followed. Morton was in Boston on business—had arrived that morning—and had written his mother to meet him there on Decoration Day, knowing how she would love to go to her father's grave that day.

"I didn't know until I got here," he said, "that you were playing here. Mother knew it, of course, from the Boston papers. We called at your hotel an hour ago and left our cards; we're at Young's."

"You must come back to lunch with me, and to the play to-night, if you care to. I wish you'd come to lunch, too," she said to Clo—who declined, however, and soon slipped away.

Left to themselves, these three who were knit so close by their common memories of The Old Man, had a happy half hour in his presence, as it were, talking now of him, now of poor Sadie and the baby, now of Felicity and what she was doing. She told them something of her conversation with Clorinda, and they laughed at her, gently, for the excitement she displayed over it.

"I can't help it," she said, laughing, too, "every day, it seems to me, I make a tremendous discovery of something everybody else in the world has known all along, and I get so excited I can hardly contain myself and all my knowledge! I go around thinking 'Ah, ha! *this* explains *that*, which

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has always been a mystery to me. Now, if I can only play such-and-such a character again, I'll know how to turn a regular calcium light on her motives and what beset her!' People ask me, sometimes, why I don't leave the stage. Why, almost every day I have a new conviction that I can never leave it until I've gone back and reinterpreted all the parts I've played wrong, and put in all the delicate touches of understanding I left out because I didn't know any better. It's such an unrelenting passion, this passion to portray! And when one has found out a modicum of what one yearns to know, then it's time to lie here, and let the raw new generation come on and make the same mistakes.”

“Your zest for life is wonderful, Felicity.” Morton was without bitterness, but there was no ardor about him any more—only patience.

“I *am* zestful,” she admitted, “I feel it every day I live. My life is hard, in many ways, and sometimes I think I've lost all love for it, but deep down in my heart I know better, for it's interesting—my! but it's interesting. The minute I get a scrap of knowledge I can feel it going into use—can feel how I've always needed it, and wonder how I got along without it. It's like being a painter and learning each day how to mix some new color that was impossible to you yesterday, and you can hardly wait to get at a canvas to try

Felicity

it. Only, if you're a painter, you can go over the old canvases and touch 'em up with your new knowledge. I can't. When a performance is played it is played, and become a memory—hundreds of memories! I can't recall it, and give it a wiser interpretation. I may do the character better for another occasion, but the same people won't see it; today's knowledge is no use to last night's audience. But that's only life, as The Old Man used to remind me—today's wisdom can't recall the indiscretions of last week, he used to say, but one must be a man about one's mistakes. Nobody knows how often I've comforted myself with that!"

As they were leaving the cemetery the incoming crowds seemed to swarm over everything. The early comers had been many, but all reverent—nearly all there to decorate some hallowed spot. These later comers were the advance guard of the holiday army, and they brought with them an air of sight-seeing, of pleasure-seeking, that blew harsh on delicate sensibilities. Romping children chased each other in the paths and even among the graves; elders chatted inconsequently, and hunted for stones bearing well-known names, with an idle curiosity that angered Felicity.

"I hate their coming here to gape and stare," she said, resentfully. "I hate their laughter, in this place where so many hearts have broken. And

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yet,” whimsically, tenderly, “I remember being here with The Old Man, once, on Decoration Day, and there were just such crowds, and I had just such hate of them, and he wouldn’t uphold me. He said I wouldn’t feel that way when I was older—that I’d be glad people could laugh and be careless sometimes, when I knew how hard their lives were most times. But I’m not that old yet!”

When they got back to the Parker House, Felicity ordered luncheon in her rooms and found there Morton’s card accompanying just such a box of pink roses as he always sent her.

Vincent was up, and immaculate. He kept a man, now, and was a greater dandy than ever—always in perfect taste, and the perfection of grooming. He held the conference with the waiter and gave explicit directions about the lunch. Felicity never bothered about such things when she could depute them to this past master.

He was charmingly contrite about the unmailed letter, and promised to send it to Frances when he found it—which he did, late that afternoon, and despatched it to her with a box of flowers and tickets for a box at the play that night.

“Vincent Delano is a puzzle to me,” Frances told Morton when the messenger had delivered his burden and gone. “When I’m with him, I can understand why Felicity married him, but when

Felicity

I'm away from him, I can only wonder how she could do it."

"I don't believe I can see it any of the time," returned Morton. "He's colossally selfish and vain, and——"

"Father was selfish—in a way," Frances ruminated, "he wasn't a man who sacrificed his comforts or his own way. But he always managed to get what he wanted without seeming insistent about it. I don't know how it was—he never gave up his way, but he could usually make his way so desirable. He——"

"Oh, rubbish, Mater dear! Excuse me, but I can't stand to hear you compare Gran with this weakling Delano! It infuriates me to see a sleek fellow like that sliding through the world without a care, and then, to cap it all, some exquisite woman like Felicity comes along and pours all her treasures at his dapper feet."

"That's the pity," commented Frances, "of a situation like hers. A woman's cruelly placed, for happiness, when she's on the heights. Only a very big-souled man is fine enough to live with her without jealousy or without deterioration and, somehow, they're the men who are always standing back, silent, because they are afraid they have nothing to offer; and ordinary men, such as make ordinary women good husbands, are too vain, too fond of dominance, to try it; so it leaves women

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like Felicity to the mercy of such groundlings as don't care what their relationships are if only they're fed and—and perfumed! ”

Morton's face wore a strange look, as if there was much he wanted to say, but could not.

“ Marriage is the *great* mystery,” he said, generalizing with evident effort as one not daring to particularize, “ either a wonderful Providence or an unmerciful satirist must be back of it all—and it's hard to guess which! ”

It was only in such indirect ways as this that Morton ever revealed the hurt of his heart. His resignation, his gentle devotion, had been wonderful, as they always are in a young man full of zest for life and success and the pleasures of his fellows, and compelled to endure and not to achieve. Frances had all a mother's intense yearning over her child so cruelly afflicted, but she dared not voice the questions that tortured her heart, dared not probe to find if he were rebellious for Sadie only, or for himself as well. That he could be other than rebellious in his heart, Frances did not even hope. How could he be other? So young, and face to face with a life-long tragedy. If his love for poor Sadie were great enough, this thing might come in time to be a wonderful ennobling to him. But if it were not greater than his self-pity, she knew how all the chances were in favor of his becoming hard or careless. His salvation

Felicity

lay in his caring so much on Sadie's account that he would forget to be self-pitying. But, vital as she knew this matter to be, Frances dared not broach it, save indirectly. There are some soul-depths too sacred for even a mother to invade.

Felicity played in *Marianna* that night and played it with a freshness, a zestfulness which owed a great deal, Morton felt sure, to her interview with Clorinda that day. After the play, he and Frances went back for a few minutes' chat with Felicity. While they were in her dressing-room, Vincent came in, ready for the street; Felicity still wore her make-up, and was just as she had come off the stage, in her regal gown and weight of jewels.

"Dearest," said Vincent, "I see it's likely to be a good while before you're ready to go, and I'm going to ask these good friends to see that you get to the hotel—as it's on their way. I'm awfully sorry, but I've a supper engagement. Felicity'll never sup, you know," he added to the Allstons. "And I have to make all my engagements without her. It's no end of a pity, I'm always telling her, that she can't give more people the pleasure of her society—but she's always too tired." He kissed her, hoped to see the Allstons to-morrow, and was gone.

They walked back to the hotel through the soft

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May night, loitering past the Common while Felicity recalled for them the scene of her first rehearsal, there on a bench in the Mall.

“I’d ask you in,” she said, at the hotel door, “but I’m feeling very tired—Mt. Auburn, I suppose—and to-morrow is my double work, you know. I’ll see you Sunday morning, and we’ll have a lovely, restful day in Millville. Good-night.”

Upstairs, overlooking King’s Chapel with its ancient burying-ground, Felicity had the finest suite the hotel afforded, the suite that had housed so many notables. But it was lonely, to-night; not even the ghosts of other days could give it interest. Morton’s roses were more companionable than all the rest.

Felicity had her dressing-gown and slippers put on and her shining hair brushed—to keep it shining. Then she dismissed Celeste.

When the woman was gone, she turned the lights low and sat down by the window in a deep armchair. The squat outlines of the historic church were very nearly all her view—but she was not seeing them.

She was still sitting there, quite wide awake, when Vincent came in, at past two o’clock.

CHAPTER XX

VIGIL

I TELL you, they all say the same thing: 'The dog towns may stand for it, but New York won't.' "

Garvish was angry and excited, and his voice had as much threatening in it as a manager might dare to employ toward the most profitable star in the country.

The final curtain had just fallen on the first night of the Fergus season in New York. It was mid-October, 1894—that year of financial panic in which the theatres suffered so severely. Those people who could pay to be beguiled of their worries, were still theatre-going; but every theatre that did not yield the full worth of its charges in diversion, was the scene of disaster.

The public was willing to spend of its diminished amusement allowance on Felicity. She always beguiled it thoroughly, never gave it the horrors, always made it laugh and sent it away with a kindlier feeling toward the world as a place to live in. Then, too, she had been playing abroad a great deal, the last two years, and New York

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had seen little of her. London had gone quite mad over Felicity; honors were heaped upon her almost to suffocation, and American critics abroad wrote back reports of her great gain in depth of power. Garvish congratulated himself, in the furore of their return in August, that he was one man whose prospects for the season were good.

Then came an altercation about a play. They had played repertoire abroad, with an occasional long run on some special—and often quite unexpected—favorite. The American public was eager to see Felicity again in rôles she had made famous; but she insisted on a new play, too. Garvish complained bitterly of the hard times, the needless expense, but Felicity was obdurate, as gently, immovably obdurate as ever her little mother had been. She had a tremendous stock of inherited obduracy to draw on, had Felicity.

Ordinarily, she cared little for management, nothing for venture. She was anxious only to be free of managerial cares, that she might give the more time and energy to her personal work. She was not greedy for money—there were so few things she cared for that money would buy—and was not carried away by the new fever for “productions.” She was true to the school she was brought up in. People came to see her, she knew, and though she had never been disposed to trifle with them by offering herself in an unsuitable rôle,

Felicity

she scorned such adventitious aids as those with which her friends Irving and Terry had dazzled America in the season previous. "As if," she said to Miss Terry, "any one ever knows what's on the stage, or off it, when you're playing!"

"The best playing's possible only with the best support," she contended, "but every other consideration is folly. The illusion's in the art, or it's not there at all." There had been some interesting discussions in London before she sailed for home.

As for Garvish, he would supply anything the public would pay to see, from tank melodrama to open-air "As You Like It," but if the public would flock to see his star without other inducements than her playing, he was content to save himself worry and expense by accepting her theory of art.

Accordingly, they had fewer controversies—to put it politely—than is commonly possible between manager and star, especially between such on the basis of Felicity's contract, which was a guarantee practically amounting to salary: so that Garvish, if a big season left him a bulk of the earnings, would be the only loser by a poor one. This is not a basis nicely calculated for peace, but in this case it had never failed to satisfy Garvish, and then!—it was the only one that Felicity, with her dislike of uncertainties, would accept.

Now, in the opening weeks of what ought to be

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their biggest season—the panic notwithstanding—they were at daggers drawn. Felicity had insisted on including in her repertoire a play which everybody in her advising acquaintance had told her frankly was no play for her.

"Why, the star part's not a woman's part at all, it's a man's!" Garvish had protested.

"I suppose I may be credited with sense enough to see that," she had replied, "but you know how little I care for what's technically considered the centre of the stage. I hope I can be trusted to make that part the centre where I am!"

"Trusted nothing!" muttered Garvish, out of her hearing, "what she wants is to give that husband of hers something to satisfy his vanity. I see through her! And I won't stand for it—not on *my* money!"

It was a continual grievance to Garvish, at best, to have Vincent in the company, though he liked him personally. He wanted a younger leading man, and disapproved, according to the traditions of his class, of married stars, if possible; certainly of married couples in the same company. But, of course, it was Vincent or nothing, with Miss Fergus; that was settled long ago. And as long as success continued at high tide there was no possible excuse for urging Vincent's removal; as long as all the seats were sold, it would be useless to contend that with a

Felicity

younger man in Vincent's place they could turn more people away.

Heretofore, though, Vincent had been, if not content at least willing to play supporting rôles, usually the chief. But, like every other supporting actor who ever lived, Vincent felt that only lack of chance to show himself a star had kept him out of the stellar heavens. Now, evidently, he had prevailed upon his wife to jeopardize her own fortunes and other people's by insisting on a play which would give him the part he wanted and practically subordinate her part to his.

"As if he could shine beside her if he had all the lines in the play but three, and she had those!" growled Garvish to a sympathizing friend.

But the play she would play, and after a number of tempests which wore out everybody but Vincent, who was never in them, the play was added to the repertoire and tried out on the smaller towns where the first bookings were.

These towns were, in the vernacular of Garvish, "easy." They were prepared to acclaim, and they did acclaim, for the most part. Their critics said little about the play and nothing about the other players, but concentrated their efforts on "re-hashes" of the cabled reports describing Felicity's growth, her "pre-eminence as the most artistic comédienne on the English-speaking stage with the possible exception of Ellen Terry, who, however

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we may think of her as born to be such, has essayed so great diversity of rôles that she cannot be classed as strictly a comédienne," and so on. From a box-office point of view they were satisfactory efforts: they made the public feel that not to have seen Felicity was next door to a crime of negligence. But from her point of view—glad as she was to have her choice of play unattacked—they were like most of their class, concerning which she had often said that they were one of the worst trials of success. "Few things," she always contended, "hurt me so much as slushy praise. I think: Merciful Heaven! what is the use of worrying myself sick over the subtleties of art, if no beholder has any more understanding of what I'm trying to do than this?"

There came near not being any first night in New York, as Vincent laughingly declared—not being any manager, or any star left by that time, Felicity having declared for the new play to open with.

Garvish had never seen such unyielding obstinacy. "You're crazy!" he shouted, casting gallantry to the winds, "you're determined to ruin yourself and me. There must be a law to protect me, some injunction that will restrain you. You are mad! You have lost your common-sense!"



Felicity

"They know we gave the play to other places. If we open in New York with an old play it'll be a confession that the new one won't do, that we're afraid of it!"

"Well! What of it? We are afraid of it!"

"I'm not!"

"You've lost your reason, I tell you—or you would be!"

But they opened with it, none the less. And Garvish's scout, circulating between the acts among the critics in the foyer and at the nearest bar, reported that the opinion was practically unanimous as to this being no play for Felicity. "They say," the scout reported, "that it's pathetically evident she has sacrificed herself to give Delano a chance he's not fitted for."

Garvish dared not repeat this to Felicity, but he bided confidently the time when she should see it in print, either boldly stated or in innuendo, and was almost glad to anticipate the criticism which would confirm what he had told her. To-night, he contented himself with repeating to her what the critics had been overheard to say about the play.

Felicity's brown eyes burned like black; the dull crimson flamed, beneath the make-up, over her cheeks; but she said little; restraint was born in her, she had no facile fury, easily aroused and as easily appeased. Garvish wished she had. He

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was used to that, better able to meet it and to fight it than this quiet obstinacy which seldom came out from under cover to return fusillade for fusillade.

Garvish was not given to subtleties, but he could not help reflecting—no sane man could—on how “difficult” Miss Fergus had grown since her marriage. He was not surprised; it only bore out his idea, and other managers’, that husband and wife in the same company always made “the devil to pay,” and where one of the twain was the star—well!

He spoke of Felicity to his confidants—and they were a great many—as “continually having a chip on her shoulder.” She had! Garvish could not understand why. He liked Vincent, personally, very well—much better than he liked Felicity. And Vincent, Garvish argued, did not seem to flirt with other women—much; he was conspicuously gallant to his wife, and they always appeared to be on the most affectionate and good-natured terms. That, notwithstanding all this, the marriage might have proved a galling disappointment to Felicity, Garvish did not dream, could not have dreamed. He attributed many of the things she did, the things that exasperated him, to her being “spoiled,” and told himself that marriage had made her worse because Vincent was “such a slave to her.”

Felicity

Garvish could testify to that slavery. He had travelled with them, now, five years, and he knew that Vincent never left his wife, when they got aboard their private car, until he saw that she was comfortably settled; only then would he join the men of the staff and company, forward in the Pullman smoker. When they reached each stopping-place, Vincent was full of solicitude about the hotel quarters engaged for them, and the reasonable comfort of the theatre dressing-rooms. Only when she expressed herself satisfied, would he leave her, to knock around with the fellows and see a little of the world outside the theatre—the world she seemed to care nothing about. According to Garvish's idea, Vincent's manners toward his wife were ridiculously fine; he rose when she entered the room, he opened doors for her and adjusted shawls and rugs, and fetched and carried for her generally, in ways quite unnecessary, as she kept two maids. All this had made Miss Fergus, in Garvish's opinion, "very difficult." He thought her the embodiment of self-worship, and was surprised when she showed this obstinate eagerness to put on a play which would give Vincent the "fat" part. He hadn't thought her likely to reciprocate in that way; it was hardly in human nature for any star to do that. But much as he might have admired the magnanimity in other circumstances, Garvish was little concerned with motives in this particular

Vigil

instance. He did not care why Felicity wanted to do this thing; he cared only that she should be kept from doing it.

Something of all these things was in his subconsciousness to-night as he stood looking at her, in her cluttered, close-smelling little dressing-room—hardly more than a booth, with none of the elegance about it that the public might think befitting so great a star.

Celeste and Justine, the second maid, were both busy with the elegant costumes, jewels and other accessories Felicity had worn during the evening. They were tired to exhaustion, and moved wearily in the restricted space, "stumping" in their broad, heelless slippers. Any one less accustomed to them than Garvish, would have grinned to note how little they looked like the pictures of French maids in the magazines, or like the French maids they themselves sometimes personated on the stage—speaking their line or two flirtatiously and then tripping off to discard their high-heeled shoes, tiny, ruffled aprons and butterfly caps, for gear better suited to the hard work they had to do.

Felicity herself was almost ugly at such close range in her make-up; the rouge and pencil her delicate features and coloring made so necessary for the stage, were quite grotesque, at a distance of three feet.

"No!" she said, sharply, as more cards were

Felicity

brought her, "tell them all 'no,' I told you! Why do people insist on trying to see me on a first night? Haven't they any sense? any decency? don't they know I'm so nervous I'm sick?"

"Some o' these are newspaper men," said Garvish, looking at the cards.

"Critics?"

"No; reporters, I guess."

"I won't see them. What do they want?"

Garvish shrugged. "Shall I ask them?"

"Yes; but don't bring them in here. I won't see them."

While Garvish was at the stage door, Vincent came over from his dressing-room across the stage. He was giving a little supper after the play, and, in evening dress, with his Inverness cloak across his arm and his opera hat in hand, he looked as if he might be about to step before an audience in one of those polite comedy rôles wherewith he was so identified. It was a current observation in stagedom that no other man on the boards wore evening dress so elegantly as Vincent. "No one would ever mistake him for a waiter," people agreed, "he's the real thing, when it comes to fine manners and fine clothes." Vincent was fully aware of this opinion and it gave him, perhaps, a deeper satisfaction than if he had been acclaimed "the real thing" in art.

"Why, hello!" he exclaimed, cheerily, looking

Vigil

in on the confusion in his wife's dressing-room, "just as you came off! What's the matter?"

"Oh," Felicity gave one glance at the two weary maids, as if she could not speak her mind before them. Vincent had a way of acting as if servants had neither ears, tongues, nor understanding, and it was a way by which Felicity, who knew better, was often irritated. But, unable to restrain herself longer, she laid her head on the dressing-table in front of her and gave way to tears.

"Oh, come, dearest, this won't do," soothed Vincent, laying an arm about her shoulder and bending low so his cheek lay against her hair. "You're tired to death, poor child!" he said, "why don't you just go home the way you are, without bothering to undress and dress again? Justine can finish here and let Celeste go with you. Come on! I'm terribly sorry I can't go with you—if I'd known you would be undone like this I'd never have made an engagement, but I owe a lot to these people and they're waiting for me at the Waldorf——"

He took her long cloak down from a peg and hung it about her shoulders. Justine handed him a lace scarf for her head.

"Come!" He half led, half carried her out to the stage door, where Garvish was still haranguing the reporters, trying to make sure of favorable

Felicity

space. Celeste followed, carrying Felicity's street clothes.

The reporters, who had come to ask impertinent questions, felt they would not need to ask them, when they stood aside and watched Vincent put his evidently weeping wife into her carriage with her maid and heard him give the order to drive home quickly. This done, he had the doorkeeper call a cab for him, and urged the driver to "hustle—I've guests waiting at the Waldorf."

Garvish had been asked to the supper, but expressed himself as "too tired of life to eat."

"Pshaw!" said Vincent, "have some sand about you!"

"I bet you change your tune in the morning," was Garvish's unspoken prediction as the cab with its blithe occupant rolled away.

When the reporters had been disposed of—"No," Garvish assured them, "there is positively no truth in the report that Miss Fergus is playing a subordinate part and starring her husband"—Garvish betook himself moodily to a favorite little resort unfrequented by theatrical folk; and there, waiting for him by appointment, was a crony of well-trying sympathy into whose ear Garvish poured afresh all his grievances.

It was two o'clock when they left this place, but Garvish declared himself so little inclined for

Vigil

sleep that the very idea of trying made him desperate. He proposed a walk, and the crony agreed.

Already, in the quiet streets, the air was beginning to have some of the freshness of the dawn-breeze, though dawn was hours away. The overcharged atmosphere of the day, with its dense, hurrying throngs, had given place to an air that blew refreshingly across ample, uncrowded spaces. The city was like a room that has been suffocatingly full and then is emptied and aired and suddenly seems spacious. The breaths one drew were invigorating, and not all contaminated with smoke and the waste gases of other lungs. It was possible to swing along the pavements at a circulation-stirring stride without running down pedestrians like a Juggernaut.

Garvish, who always asserted that he could not sleep till the sun was shining, loved his familiar, home city at this hour. He even had a liking for such humanity as he found abroad in these still, small hours—felt a brotherliness for any variety of “owl” from a belated clubman to an all-night cabby or “Sandwich Jack,” from a newspaper man going home late to a newspaper boy getting out early.

Broadway was almost lively, for a Monday night, as they strode up toward Forty-second Street, and beyond. Coming back, they chose

Felicity

Sixth Avenue, and stopped several times in all-night resorts. It was past three when they reached Herald Square, and damp, ink-smelling papers were being loaded into wagons for the suburbs; the country edition had gone, an hour ago.

"Well," said Garvish, nervously, "here's one paper; let's see what they do to us."

He had no undue reverence for newspaper comment, but he knew that this was an unusually "ticklish" time and an unusually difficult situation. People were not spending money recklessly this fall; if half a dozen critics agreed that the new Fergus play was a poor vehicle for her, the public would stay away—not all of it, of course, but that large body of it which makes the difference between poor business and big profits. Of course they would withdraw the failure immediately, but it was a mighty inauspicious way to begin.

The *Herald* met all dire expectations: "Miss Fergus opened last night to the most brilliant audience of the season, in a play so unsuited to her talents as to make one marvel why it should ever have been selected for their exploitation. We had been keyed up, by cabled reports of her greatly matured powers as a comédienne, to expect something extraordinarily gratifying, and were, therefore, the more keenly disappointed to see her in a play that practically gave her no chance. The

Vigil

play is not a bad one, but wholly unsuitable for Miss Fergus. The stellar character is really a male one, and gave Mr. Delano far more prominence than Miss Fergus. If, as has been hinted, Miss Fergus was well aware of this, she cannot too soon be made to recognize her error. The public goes to see her at her best, not to help her launch a new favorite. Much has been written of the selfishness of theatrical stars, but it has an abundant justification in contrast with this action of Miss Fergus's, which might, if one were inclined for brutal frankness, be called an outright breach of good faith with a public that has lavished favors on her and merits a better expression of her gratitude."

There was a good deal more in the same vein; the other papers took practically the same view. Even the dean of dramatic critics, who had been Felicity's friend from her childhood, as he had been the ardent friend of The Old Man, did not spare her, though there was more sorrow than anger expressed in his comment. Several of the younger men's critiques carried a fair implication of malice, Garvish thought—that little outcropping of mean spirit with which some persons always hail any failure of the great.

Well—the worst was come to worst! It remained only to bury the dead, and *not* to raise a monument!

Felicity

In her big, silent house on Thirty-eighth Street, east of Fifth Avenue, Felicity sat, wide awake and alone—more terribly alone than even she had ever been, who was alone so much.

She had dismissed the fagged Celeste as soon as possible, and in dressing-gown and slippers sat over the log fire in her bedroom. It was a bitter night for her. No one could ever know what she had hoped from this mad venture—least of all Vincent, for whom it had been made. The world would know she had done this thing to give him satisfaction, but it would never know how much besides a little professional reputation she had risked, and to what ends.

Success was worth so little to her, she reflected, she could well afford to throw a little of it away. It brought her nothing she cared about. Certainly it had proved no aid to her married happiness. She knew, could not help knowing, there were few women so beautiful as she, few so celebrated for charm and talent, few on whom the world lavished so much favor. Yet Vincent seemed unmindful of all this. He showed no ardor for her society, no devotion to her career; he took her for granted, in his amiable, irresponsible, Vincent-way. He had none of the yearning over her that men showed for women who were plain and sick and embittered and complaining; that Morton had shown for poor Sadie, for instance, poor Sadie

Vigil

who had fretted herself quite out a year ago and left Morton—how? Felicity had not seen him since Sadie's death, and she wondered about him a good deal. Her gaze travelled from the fire to the vase of pink roses on her dresser—his greetings and good wishes for the return to America and the new play. He never forgot! How did he feel? Felicity wondered. She had never seen such tenderness as he showed Sadie. And yet!—Felicity could recall a night in Chicago before she went abroad two years ago last spring, another Sunday night when she spent the evening in the Allstons' sitting-room as on that long-ago night of Adelaide Walters's funeral. Sadie was there, blind and fretful, taking little part in the conversation save to interrupt it now and then with some petulant request. Then, somehow, in spite of Sadie, she and Morton got fairly launched on one of those conversations that stand out sharply in the memory forever after and haunt one with their unforgettable wondrousness, tease one with their rarity; soul revealed itself to soul, not in words, wholly, but in tones, in looks, in gestures, in very silences, and both became rapt with a sense of companionship that was ecstasy. In the midst of this, a chance question of Felicity's brought a look to Morton's face—such a look! She shrank from before it and he—he bent his head in shame and covered the tell-tale face with his hands, while



Felicity

blind Sadie sat by, all unconscious. When she broke the terrible silence with a request, he complied with a passionate tenderness that seemed to Felicity the acme of piteousness. It was all in the briefest instant, and afterwards there was nothing to show that it ever had been, but Felicity never forgot the mute imploring of that look, never ceased to thrill to the dramatic intensity of that situation.

Oh, what a strange, weary, mixed-up world it was! Morton had said he owed more to Sadie than he could ever pay. And she? what was the state of her heart, touching Vincent? Felicity was able to take pretty good account of herself—was used to searching her heart for the answers to many burning questions about, not herself only, but others whom she could not probe. She knew she had decided to risk her own hold on success to give Vincent the chance he always declared was all he needed to establish his hold on a like success. She knew she had been willing, since her triumphs did not satisfy him, did not bind him to her, to venture quite madly to give him, if possible, triumphs of his own. Why? She wanted to see what difference it would make in him if, perchance, he did succeed. She was tired of staying always above him, in wealth, and preferment, and acclaim and everything that Vincent cared about. It was a piteous situation for a woman, and almost bound

Vigil

to be debasing to the man. If Vincent could suddenly achieve even a cheap fame—and a cheap one, she knew, would satisfy him perfectly—what alteration in their life might it not make? At least she owed it to him to try, she felt; at least she ought to give him an opportunity for the development of those qualities success breeds in a man, especially those qualities a dominant man shows to his mate. Perhaps Vincent would be tender if he could feel himself triumphant! God knew she was willing enough to take second place, if second place brought the normal order of things, if it bred happiness for the woman. God knew she had found no happiness in first place.

That it was in quest of happiness for herself much more than for Vincent, Felicity did not deny; that it was what she hoped to gain from Vincent's pleasure in success, more than any mere joy of seeing him gain it, she faced squarely—wishing, the while, that it were not so possible for her to do so. And yet, she reflected, her motives were mixed enough, since after five years of married life with Vincent she could still scheme and devise in the hope of finding the happiness she sought through him rather than beyond him where every instinct told her it must lie.

What was it? this mercilessly unidealistic understanding of Vincent and of herself, and of his attitude toward her and her attitude toward him, and

Felicity

yet, in spite of all, this continued effort to find happiness with him even at great cost.

That she responded readily, nearly always, to the magnetism of his personal charm, was a simple enough matter for her understanding. Also, she could see quite clearly how it was possible for Vincent to feel when he was with her, as he certainly did, her charm, and yet feel other charms just as enjoyably when they came his way. Felicity did not grudge him this ability—not now. She was not jealous, which she took to be indisputable evidence she was not in love. And yet, interestedly as she watched Vincent, and speculated about him and learned through him, she was capable of keen hurt every time he signally failed her as he had to-night. It mattered not a whit to her with whom he was, but that he was willing to leave her alone in her defeat and chagrin! that was galling—not because he could conceivably have been of much comfort to her, but because he showed no willingness, after all her sacrifice for him, to do for her what he could. Yes!—and because people, a great many people, would see him at the Waldorf with his gay party, of which he would be the gayest, and in the morning they would know of the night's disaster, and could deduce from his conduct only disrespect of her—of her! whom all the world but her husband honored. It was intolerable!

Vigil

When she was on the crest of the success wave, Vincent's habitual appearance at gayeties without her was marked enough, but people had grown used to the idea that she hoarded her beauty and cherished her strength with jealous care. And they knew, as well, that Vincent was convivial. They might whisper of disparity in tastes, but there was plenty in Felicity's public life with Vincent to give the lie to any suspicions of their unhappiness. But to-night! How could any one help pitying her to-night? And to-night, as on only a few other occasions of her phenomenally successful career, Felicity became aware how she dreaded the public's pity. Clo Detmar's words kept recurring to her: There were "heaps of people"—were there?—who would be glad to read of her ill-fated play. Ah! that was horrible enough, but one poor play made small havoc with fortunes so great, fame so wide as hers. Everybody met with misadventure in the choice of plays, and the distressing fact was soon forgotten. The horror that worse haunted her was that it should be found out how she had made wreck of her life, irreparable wreck—she, who was so envied for all that Fortune had lavished on her!

Felicity was not without a whimsical sense of her own inconsistency. She expressed impatience with the world for its envy of her—for not knowing that Fortune's gifts, like all others, must be

Felicity

paid for in full—and yet she shrank with quivering horror from the world's knowledge of her great defeat. She smiled at herself, sometimes, with all the amused delight in the world for this beautifully human inconsistency; she had learned early, under The Old Man's teaching, that inconsistency is the keynote of human nature, and the ability to reckon with it as such the beginning of genius. But to-night! Oh, to-night she was not in smiling mood. To-night she was sitting with clenched hands and her beautiful mouth piteously set, as if by the very might of her imperious defiance she would ward off that pity which to her was ignominy.

"I won't have it!" she sobbed, "I won't have it!"

Then she heard a cab roll up, heard Vincent's key in the door, heard him coming up the stairs, heard him talking to his man, who had been dozing by the fire. In a few minutes she heard Peters go upstairs to his own quarters. She opened the door between Vincent's room and hers and went in and sat on the edge of his bed. Vincent had been drinking, of course, but he was not drunk—only very sleepy, after having been very gay. He was almost asleep when Felicity touched him.

"What is it?" he murmured, drowsily.

"Nothing," she said, "I was awake, and I came in to say good-night."

Vigil

"Good-night, dearest," returned Vincent, cheerfully, and dozed off again.

Back in her room, Felicity debated whether she should lay a fresh log on the embers, or creep into bed. Oh, anything but bed—to lie and stare into the dark and see horrid shapes and toss in writhing inability to escape from them! So she laid two logs on her fire and drew her big chair closer to it. In the leaping flame-light she could see the clock-face; it was nearly four o'clock.

Her whole mind being on the thing she dreaded, it occurred to her to wonder if Vincent had got an early paper. He could not have been in the Waldorf to this hour; he must have been over among the all-night resorts where the newspaper men stopped on their way uptown, bringing early copies of the papers with them.

She got up and stole into Vincent's room again, feeling about in the semi-dark of the firelight until she found what she sought. Vincent did not stir.

She turned up the light in her room. Yes, it was *The Herald*, and it was refolded with the dramatic comment outside. Vincent had read it, evidently. Felicity read it twice—the second time as if to make sure she read aright. Then she turned the gas down, away down, again—the dark seemed her first craving—and threw herself, tense with passion, full-length on the hearth-rug. With

Felicity

an almost intolerable physical ache, her body responded to the anguish of her mind.

"I can't bear it!" Self-pity came first, and she wept for herself in this vigil so piteous. Not a soul on earth to stand by her in such an hour as this! Then defiance flamed again. "I won't bear it!" she cried, through clenched teeth.

With this, she got up and bathed her tear-swollen face, warming her cold hands in the same act. Then she went resolutely to bed. Unimpaired beauty, redoubled spirits—these were the bulwarks of her defence; with them, only, could she keep at bay the enemy she dreaded worse than death.

CHAPTER XXI

VINCENT IS "MADE SQUARE"

THE public memory for disaster is short-lived and easily effaced by a little subsequent success. Felicity found the nine-days' wonder over her ill-starred venture hard to bear—though less so than she had anticipated—and then a new order came treading on its heels; her return to the old repertoire met with loud acclaim, and the whole incident of the unsuccessful play seemed closed, all but forgotten. Even Vincent appeared quite satisfied, quite unregretful, quite sure that, somehow or other, the chance he had had was not the chance he had needed—that was still to come.

Felicity marvelled at his buoyancy, at his attitude toward the whole thing as a trifle that mattered little, one way or the other. But so did Garvish marvel at Felicity herself. She seemed to take the disaster almost flippantly, save that underneath her shrugging disclaimer of hurt from the mishap, Garvish felt sure he could detect a determination even in excess of any she had ever shown, to win her public with her resumption of the old rôles.

Felicity

She did win. She played with such zest, such understanding, such witchery of charm, as left her quite exhausted after each performance but brought the houses almost literally about her ears. The audiences laughed, they cried, they laughed again. She fairly shook them with pleasurable emotions, and entranced them so with the famous smile that they turned to her as the chief of all delights that beguiled dull care away, that autumn when panic was in the air and tainted every breath one drew.

So Garvish smiled again, and even the most grudging critics turned praiseful—however they qualified the praise they could not withhold, with complaints against Felicity for things she was not and never aspired to be.

"So-and-So can never forgive me for not essaying Shakespearian comedy," she told Joe Jefferson one day when she met him in Twenty-third Street, and they turned into the Eden Musée, partly to talk and partly to watch delightedly the wondering crowds among the waxworks, to stand agape before "Ajeeb" and speculate where the chess expert was who manipulated the cunning deception.

"The same fellow can never forgive me for not playing *Ædipus Tyrannus* or *The Bacchæ*! Don't you mind 'em, my dear! Look at what they do to me for sticking to 'Rip' and not trying Falstaff and Bluebeard; for not dying, when they had

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said, a year ago, that the public was probably enjoying its last opportunity to see me. Poor cusses! how'd the public know they'd ever heard of Sophocles and Shakespeare, if they didn't abuse you an' me for not playing 'em? "

On the road, to which the company did not take till nearly spring, the success of the tour amounted to a series of triumphs. Everybody was in good spirits, for it is fun to play to enthusiasm, and even the continuous grumbling of actor-folk on the road was punctuated with seasons of fine good humor—especially since they made few short stands, skipping all such places as Vincent designated "Chocolate Éclair," "Fondle Lake," and "Oshkosh, Wish.," and kept to the principal cities where living was good and fun was plenty.

The bitter experience in New York seemed never to have been heard of beyond Broadway, except here and there by a critic who took a theatrical journal or two, and who mentioned the New York failure as proof of his unforgetting "postedness." Only Felicity carried the scars of that fight. She hid them jealously, but like many another with unsuspected scars, she almost gloated over them in secret.

The quickness, nay, the very eagerness, of those who praised when they must, to blame when they could, had hurt her cruelly. Artistically, she had so quickly recovered herself as to leave scant room

Felicity

for harsh criticism unless it were of the sort that is obviously malicious, which she had been well taught to despise. Here and there, always, was some one she had refused to sup with, for the entertainment of his friends, and who paid her for her indifference or her weariness or her heaviness of heart or frailty of health—not caring for which of many reasons she might have declined to pander to his lion-hunting pride—in contemptuous print. But these things, save as they fretted Garvish, she cared little about, being keen enough to know that readers could and would discount them as readily as she.

She had never been very much upraised or cast-down by press comment on her work; The Old Man had provided against that. The consciousness that there were not a half dozen critics in the country who knew a tithe of what she herself knew of the things she essayed, made her interest in either praise or blame very slight; the inexorable judge for her, as for all artists, was the dream of perfection she carried in her own breast—the dream, so much more wonderful, always, than its best manifestation that its elusiveness was near to torment.

But when public comment went past her work and touched herself, her personality, her private life, she flamed with all the world-old resentment of the achieving when that fame they have fought

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for will not nicely differentiate between desirable and undesirable publicity, and the soul's sacredness becomes pilloried on the same eminence that uplifts successful talents to the world's view.

That any one should dare to probe beyond the ill-choice of a play and ascribe its selection to her desire to please her husband—yes, even, in some grosser instances, to hint at her need of pleasing him—that was a very agony of fame! And the new knowledge of that spirit dogging her, following with keen eyes her success as sharks follow a ship hopeful of disaster, threatened to become an obsession as, at other times in the inner history of her ascendancy, the horror of age and decay had been, and the piteousness of being gay while sick at heart, and the sense of cruel isolation from the common lot that she might cater to the common enjoyment. One by one she had suffered the penalties of her success; and when she had learned to be philosophical about one, another one grew unendurable—as if that she might continue in her experience the long-ago sufficient evidence that hearts at ease never attain heights.

In April, they arrived in Chicago to play a month's engagement. There was a balm like summer in the air, as there often is in April in this capricious climate where birds and buds are tricked into thinking the melancholy days are past and then, presto! in five minutes old Boreas blows

Felicity

slantwise across the lake again, "the white sea horses troop and roam" on the blue that just now shimmered like satin on a woman's gently heaving breast, and the weather man in his aerie croaks "Frost, to-night!"

Morton's floral greeting was in Felicity's rooms when she arrived, late Sunday afternoon, from St. Louis; and that evening he called. So, too, did a lot of other people—two or three dramatic critics, the proprietor of a prominent newspaper, half a dozen actor-folk playing in town, the manager of the theatre Felicity was to play in, and so on, including several "smart" people who wished to tender functions to Felicity, and a college president who looked incredulous when she refused his invitation to address his college on "Woman and the Comedy Spirit," saying she should die of fright if she had to "stand up with my Sunday clothes on and talk out in meeting."

There was not much opportunity for conversation with Morton, whom alone of all the little crowd she cared to see and who, alone of all the little crowd, cared anything for her aside from her success.

"It's a beautiful night, isn't it?" she said, as he held her hand a moment, in taking leave.

The question seemed a little irrelevant, a little odd for Felicity, who was not given to talking about the weather if the extent of her acquaintance

Vincent is "Made Square"

permitted anything more interesting. But Morton saw, and rightly interpreted her glance, which roved restlessly over the brilliantly lighted rooms, with their profusion of flowers and their chattering groups.

"I wish," she whispered, "we could skip all this and sit out on a park bench, 'under the wide and starry sky,' and—talk!"

"I wish we could!" he echoed, smiling at the hopelessness of it.

"I haven't seen you in years," she said, "and— and so much has happened."

"To me, yes," he answered, soberly.

"And to me!"

"Ah, to you, yes! More crowns, more incense, more——"

"Oh, please! *Et tu, Brute!* I can't stand it from you too."

"Forgive me! I wish I could offer you something—something out of this stifling, incense-heavy air—to make your stay here pleasant. But I don't know what it could be——"

"Come and see me, when you can. There's not much time, I know—you're busy all day and I'm busy all the evening, but you might take early dinner with us some night, or luncheon any day but Saturday; and I'll try to avoid this," indicating with the slightest nod of her head the crowded rooms, "next Sunday."

Felicity

Vincent clapped Morton heartily on the back as he said good-night to him. He felt that Morton did not like him, but Vincent cherished no grudges. So many people did like him that he could only feel sorry for those who did not, as if the fault must lie in their own churlishness since it could not possibly lie in his good nature.

"Glad to've seen you, old man," Vincent assured him, "you must dine with us some evening soon."

Morton thanked him and was gone, with one backward look at Felicity, who seemed, somehow, so incongruously placed in the little throng of chattering people Vincent loved to have about him. All she ever asked for enjoyment was a bit of isolation for two—anywhere that conduced to "talk of thee and me and this mad world, my masters,"—and that thing alone Fate seemed to grudge her.

Vincent ordered supper at eleven o'clock and asked the lingerers to stay. Felicity was very tired, but felt she could not withdraw, so she sat through the supper with what grace she could summon, eating only a nibble of cracker now and then and taking a sip of wine.

It was past midnight when the last guest left, and their sitting-room was chokingly close with cigarette smoke and heavy, thrice-breathed air. Felicity directed the waiter who cleared away the supper things, to throw both windows wide open.

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A tide of cool, sweet air rushed in; even the heart of the city, with the belching smokestacks of engines not a block away, had a caressing softness in its air to-night, and Felicity leaned out to enjoy the freshness. Michigan Avenue was nearly deserted, and from her bay window she could look far south to where the long lines of boulevard lamps seemed to converge on the edge of infinitude. Turning from the window with a quick, nervous movement, she confronted Vincent, who was lighting a fresh cigarette.

"I want to go out," she said.

"Out where?" he asked, in surprise.

"For a walk—anywhere, to get out of these stuffy rooms!"

"But you said you were so tired you could hardly breathe!"

"I am; but I can't sleep. All those people made me wildly nervous. I must get out."

Vincent looked dismayed. Felicity had some uncomfortable habits when she got out on occasions of this sort; she liked to go out on the Van Buren Street viaduct, for instance, and hang over the parapet by the half hour, watching the red and green lights of the switches and the long lines of steel rails shining dimly in the gloom or brightly in the glare of an engine headlight; or she would wander out past the multitudinous tracks to the breakwater, and sit down by the lake, watching the

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revolving lights in the Government lighthouse, and the rhythmic riding at anchor of the fleet of tiny yachts. Vincent cordially disliked both these pastimes, and he tried to dissuade Felicity from her present purpose, whatever it might be. But she was insistent. She had, however, no such purpose as Vincent dreaded; the very thought of trying to enjoy those odd pleasures of hers with Vincent chafing at her side would have been maddening. All she wanted was air and movement—mere outlet for her restlessness, not such positive delights of companionship as Vincent, she now knew too well, could not give her.

“I’m dog-tired, dear girl,” he pleaded.

“You never went to bed at this time in your life,” she declared.

“Yes, I did—at Fair View!”

“But not before, nor since,” she laughed.

“Please, Vincent,” she went to him and laid a hand on his arm, “I don’t know what’s the matter with me, dear, but I feel as if I should smother if I don’t get out.”

“Unhand me, wretch!” he retorted, lightly, lifting her hand to his lips; “you have no bowels of mercy, woman! You know that when you come and lay your hand on your poor, old, ‘wore-out’ husband, you can make him do anything. I can’t see why you don’t play Lady Macbeth—you’re so persuasive. Hark! ‘I hear a knocking!’” He

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mimicked Lady Macbeth's manner when Macduff's persistent summons at the gate is heard, so that Felicity shivered.

"Oh, don't," she begged, "you make me creep, all over!" Then they both laughed, and got their hats and coats without waking either maid or man, dozing on duty.

Out on the broad, deserted avenue they turned south and wandered, at a straggling gait, for a half mile or so, encountering fewer than a dozen persons on the way. When they turned to go back, Vincent said:

"Let's go over to Wabash, and walk back on that; it's the border of the Tenderloin, but anything's better than this—graveyard!"

She acquiesced, and they went through the first cross street to Wabash Avenue, where a multitude of saloons were still open and many other signs indicated that the Red Light district was far from somnolence.

Felicity should not have gone there; it interested her intensely, but she always lay awake for hours after a glimpse of sights like these. Used as she was, in a way, to the squalid tragedies of a part of stageland, and worldly-wise as her mental attitude toward the besetting sins had been since her very childhood, she retained a great deal of instinctive horror, not of debased human nature so much as over it. She did not wonder that flesh was

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weak, did not incline to blame it for its weakness, but the pitilessness of the fate that rewarded weakness always left her with a sense as of having seen foolish, helpless things mangled by a monster. Once, after a tour of San Francisco's Chinatown, she had a dream in which she seemed to see a head, like that of a Chinese dragon colossally magnified, filling the end of a short street down which wandered, ceaselessly, a stream of young girls, each of whom, as she reached him, the behemoth swallowed with one click of his awful jaws. She had waked up crying, "Oh, why don't they stop coming?" And the dream was so vivid that it always recurred to her when she saw into the underworld of the engulfed.

Vincent saw her shudder as two very young girls, probably the cheaper type of shop girls, lurched past them, leering drunk, and in charge of two evil-looking youths of nineteen or twenty.

"I oughtn't to have brought you here," he said, penitently; "I ought to have remembered how it hurts you! Come, we'll go back to Michigan Avenue through the next street."

"I can't tell you how I feel," she said, "to have such horror of these things and yet be able to do nothing but shudder and be led gently away. It seems as if a woman as old as I am, who's had as much experience of the world as I have had, ought to be able to do something more for a girl like that

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than just to moan over her after she's brushed past me on her way to—God knows what!"

"My God, no!" Vincent answered, almost roughly. "You don't know anything about it, and you couldn't do any more to stop it than you could to dam Niagara. Forget it! That's all you can do."

Felicity looked up at him as he spoke, and thrilled, vaguely, to the tone of his voice, the look in his face—both expressing the sense of desecration he felt at the bare suggestion of her in contact with that baser world he knew too well to be able to think of without horror at her touching it. She knew that Vincent was not always "up to her," as he said; that there were times, a-plenty, when his mood demanded freer company; but always he was reverent of that in her which was better than he aspired to be; always he was fiercely jealous of that goodness in her which seemed to him to reflect honor back on him, too, in some mysterious way. And since she had ceased looking, in Vincent, for a continuous matching of his mood with hers—and alas! in spite of all her professed philosophy before marriage, she had done this very thing, after marriage, for a piteous while—she had known a good deal of tender pride in these occasional moments when she felt that notwithstanding his—well, his difference—Vincent was bound to her by a very great tie. He was not worthy of

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her, he said quite frankly and often, and perhaps he did not try to be. But in his own way he loved her as he had never loved and never could love any one else. It was not a ministering love—ah, dear no! Poor Vincent had not even a suspicion of what that might be, beyond opening doors and fetching shawls, maybe; it was not born of tenderness—success had held tenderness at bay—but it was reverent. No woman will choose reverence if she can get tenderness, but Felicity was glad to get what she could, what her success allowed her, and her eyes shone with happy tears as she looked up at Vincent. He read the look and smiled down at her, patting the hand that lay on his arm. Suddenly she clutched his sleeve.

“What is it?” he asked.

She seemed speechless with excitement for a moment, then she said, “Ashley—Jack Ashley; I saw him go in there,” she pointed, “and Arline Prentiss was with him.”

“Who was with him?”

“Arline Prentiss—that little girl who played with me once; she was the girl I took to Yonkers that day—you met her with me in Delmonico’s.”

“Well, I’m sorry for her if she’s fallen in with Jack Ashley,” said Vincent, greatly relieved to trace her agitation to nothing worse.

“I don’t suppose she knows about him—oh, isn’t it terrible that he should be at large in the

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world, wrecking women's lives? Poor Clo told me such awful things she suffered. And now, God knows where she is—in some Potter's Field, probably!—and he's here with that nice girl!"

"Oh, come, darling! I wouldn't worry about it. The girl's old enough now to know what she's doing—it's six years since she was with you, remember. And everybody knows what Ashley is; she can't be the one person alive who doesn't know he's a villain."

This was soundly reasonable, yet Felicity lay awake for hours, till the early dawn was breaking, haunted by the horror of Arline Prentiss's undoing.

In the morning, early, she got Mr. Leffler by 'phone, and told him to find out if Arline was playing with any company in town, and if he could locate her to ask her if she would not call on Miss Fergus. Then she went back to bed and slept till noon.

Vincent joined her at luncheon—his breakfast, always, hers, too, today—and she told him what she had done. He was displeased.

"Hang it, Felicity," he began, crossly, "you can't meddle in people's affairs like that! They're not minors, and you're not their guardian. I know you mean well, but it's a confounded impertinence, don't you know!"

Her eyes flashed. "It would be a confounded impertinence, I suppose, if I saw Arline driving

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toward an open draw in the river, here, and called to her to look out? ”

“ It isn’t the same,” he retorted; “ the law doesn’t allow people to kill themselves—you have to stop them if you can—but it grants them the perfect right to go to the devil.”

“ Well, there’s a law that doesn’t—a better law! I couldn’t do anything for those poor creatures we saw last night, but I can do something for Arline—I can save her from worse harm, if it’s too late to save her from harm altogether.”

“ You’re probably too late, now, to save her from anything, I tell you—she wouldn’t have been in that district with a man of Ashley’s reputation at that hour of night, if she had any ‘ saving ’ in her. And you’ll get your head in your hand, probably, for meddling with Jack Ashley; you know he’s a nasty fellow, and loves a fight.”

“ I’m not afraid of him,” defiantly; “ are you? ”

“ You know I’m not! I can lick two of him with one hand. But you, who are always talking about the responsibility you owe your managers and your company and your public!— What right do you figure out that you have to tamper with the dirty passions of a brute like Ashley? ”

Felicity had never seen Vincent—easy-going, habitually good-natured Vincent—so angry. But she persisted in her determination, and he went out, raging.

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"This is what comes of marrying a woman with money and fame and all the things that make her perfectly independent of you," he told himself, as he strode up Michigan Avenue; "if she were really my wife, I could have some control of her, for her own safety and good! As it is, I'm nothing but a—a kind of thing she tolerates as long as I don't cross her—like Leffler! I know Jack Ashley—dirty dog! And I know he's no man for her to meddle with. My God!"

He stopped, abruptly, as a horrible thought struck him; then retraced his steps, almost running, and was back at the hotel before he reflected that Jack Ashley could not possibly know, yet, what Felicity designed, even if word had been got to Arline Prentiss.

Angry at Felicity, rather than at himself, for his needless terror, he thought, first, he would go upstairs and "have it out with her"—threaten her with whatever authority he could muster, plead with her, maybe, anything to make her see the error of her resolve. But while he pondered, he saw Arline Prentiss go up to the desk in the office and, presumably, ask for Miss Fergus.

That determined him. There would be no time, now, to argue with Felicity, with the Prentiss girl knocking at the door. So he turned on his heel, angrily, and betook himself off to Rector's, to see if any one he knew were lingering over a late

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lunch there. As he had reason to expect, several cronies of his were there, and he spent the afternoon with them, there, until half-past three or so, then playing billiards, having "a look in" on a poolroom where special wire returns were coming in from the New Orleans and Memphis races, and drifting around in idle, actor fashion until it was time to think of early dinner.

Vincent never felt constrained to dine with Felicity. He was seldom with her in the before-dinner hours, except on matinée days, and it was usually pleasanter for him to dine with the people he happened to be with. Whoever they were, they were sure to make a pleasure of the meal and to make something of an ado over him as a jovial dinner-mate. And with Felicity, dinner was scant and simple for herself and a time of much preoccupation; she was "all theatre," and had no mind for anything but the business of the evening. She liked to talk, at dinner, if she talked at all, about her character for the night's performance—to talk herself into it, as it were—and this bored Vincent, who was very tired of the whole repertoire and liked to forget "the shop" when he could; though he always drew a line sharply between the shop as a forum of art and that gossip about shop folks which was one of his favorite pastimes.

Felicity never expected him to dinner, never waited for him—that he was aware of—so he

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felt no compunction about staying away. He had not relegated this omission to the category of things "not the decent thing to do," like omitting to rise when she entered the room, or to hold the door for her when she passed out.

So he dined with friends, to-night, and promised, when he hurried away from them at seven o'clock, to join them and their party at supper after the play.

As he left the restaurant, a man more than half-intoxicated lurched toward him, making a futile effort to clutch him. But some one pulled the man back into his seat, with a sharp admonition to sit still and keep out of trouble, and Vincent passed out, unnoticing.

"I won't be still," cried Ashley, with drunken shrillness; "he's got to 'pologize to me for that ——— wife of his! Look a' that!" he ordered the casual acquaintance, who, seeing him "in trouble," was trying to quiet him, "look a' the letter I got f'm a friend o' mine, 'fusin' t' eat dinner with me—a gen'leman she owes ever'thing to!—because that Fergus woman poisoned her agains' me. Says she mus' 'break wi' me forever'—look a' that!"

He thrust the letter forward for the inspection his acquaintance was scrupulously trying to refrain from giving it—the frightened, tearful letter poor Arline had written him after her interview with

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Felicity, and sent by messenger to him instead of keeping her appointment for an early dinner.

After some advice to "forget it" and keep the peace, the acquaintance, an actor, hurried away to his work, leaving Ashley, who was just now, as usually, out of a job, sitting in the restaurant, muttering. He was drunk, but not drunk enough to have forgotten himself and told the acquaintance how peculiarly distressing was this "break" with the foolish girl who had been supplying him with money out of her meagre earnings—"sharing with a comrade," she called it, and tried to believe it was the *bonhomie* of "the road." But Ashley, who cared no more for the girl than men ever care for women who support them, was desperate about the withdrawal of her money.

"Goin' see tha' woman 'n' make her undo wha' she's done, 'r else make 'er good 'n' blame sorry f'r it," he told himself, as he pulled himself together with a mighty effort, and lurched out.

Felicity was in her dressing-room when Vincent reached the theatre, and he lounged in on his way to his own room. There was a deal of bustle behind the scenes, this opening night of the engagement, and stage-manager, property-man, stage-carpenter, electrician, wardrobe mistress and head scene-shifter were all busy making finally sure that their several responsibilities would be well dis-

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charged. The manager of the theatre was in evidence, too, and the director of the orchestra was getting some final instructions about the incidental music.

There was a litter of florists' boxes and tissue paper outside Felicity's door, waiting to be carried away, and he encountered Celeste coming out as he went in; she was carrying an armful of flowers for which there was no space in the small, cluttered dressing-room, nor, apparently, anywhere else in the maze of canvas and ropes and switchboards and a hundred other contrivances that filled every available inch of the stage.

Eventfulness was in the air, and even Vincent felt it. Chicago was keenly anxious to see the great comédienne for the first time in three years; the house had been sold out for a week, almost, the newspapers had column interviews, and in every quarter there was an undeniable flutter of expectation. The woman in whom it all centred sat in her shabby dressing-room, unmindful of the intricate machinery that was preparing for her exploitation—mindful only of the favorite part she was going to play.

The play, *'Toinette La Fontaine*, had been written for her, and suited her wonderfully in many ways. She herself had directed every line of it, and insisted on many dramatic heresies to emphasize her peculiar charm. For one thing, she

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entered with no blare of trumpets, no awkward salvos of applause, "no hitting people in the eye with the announcement that I am there and about to charm them," as she expressed it, quoting an oft-repeated remark of The Old Man's. When the curtain went up, there were several persons on the stage, she among them. None of the early dialogue included her or took any note of her; she might have been a "walking lady," flitting about in the background, in her simple white dress and hat with the flopping brim—until she faced suddenly around, arrested by something in the conversation going on, and smiled. There were always in the audience enough people to whom the play was new, to furnish the little gasp of surprise which accompanied her recognition; and then—oh! it were churlish to complain that so terrific a burst of applause obliged one to "step out of character" in acknowledging it. The heart that would not respond to such greeting is inconceivable.

Felicity already "looked the part" when Vincent came in; her shining, pale-brown hair was braided and bound coronet-wise about her lovely head. Her eyes were dancing with girlish fun. Her mouth, even as she directed her maids, had "the corners tucked in," as if so to contain an overflowing mirthfulness. Vincent could by no means be sure as he looked at her, whether her mood was personal or artistic. Felicity herself was like this,

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sometimes—when she was not tired, nor fretted by uncongenial company nor any one of a good many other things. She had times, off the stage when, as well as she always did on the stage, she could entrance one with her dancing comedy sense of her own delicious absurdity—make one laugh to tears with her realization of her own charming inconsistency. She was irresistible at such times, and she knew it—knew that she had only to have recourse to this manner to make a worshipper of any one who came in contact with her and to send him away committed forevermore to the belief that she was the most fascinating creature alive. But alas! in private life, in social intercourse, she could not always, or often, don her fascination at will, as she did when she went upon the boards—which was one of the many mysteries about her to Vincent, who could always do as he wanted to do, and nearly always did it.

"Well, Ladyship?" he remarked from the doorway, his voice having an interrogative tone quite expressive of his feelings.

She turned to him teasingly. "You bore me to death, Vincent—you do, really—hanging on my apron strings the whole day. Can't you find anything to amuse yourself with?"

There seemed nothing but the highest good nature in her banter, so he went in and kissed her. "Some awfully jolly people asked me to dine,"

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he explained, "and I knew you wouldn't know whether I was with you or not——"

She sniffed. "Your insignificance or my inappreciation?" she quizzed.

"Yours, of course," he answered, gayly.

She put her hands together as if praying and rolled her eyes in her favorite mockery of him as a *matinée* idol. He seized the hands and crushed them till she cried out.

"Jealous wretch!" he hissed, in fine pretence, "you spoiled all that for me when you 'up an' married me.' I knew how 'twould be, but you *would* do it!"

And before she could visit vengeance upon him, he fled, laughing, to his own quarters.

The play went with a swing that night; Felicity had never been in more exquisite humor, and no one escaped the contagion of it.

Morton, sitting alone in an orchestra chair, marvelled at the lightness and exquisite sureness of her touch, and scowled, unseen, at the ignorance of the people behind him who gushed about her "perfect naturalness—you'd hardly know she was acting."

"If they could only know," he thought, "how poor a substitute Nature would be for Art—what perfection of Art it is that hides its elaborate method under this apparent artlessness. But they

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haven't an idea what this costs her—probably think she could do it in her sleep!"

And the more his indignation burned, the more he wondered that she could play, knowing, as she must know, how little, even with all their applause, the majority of those who watched her could appreciate what she did. Sometimes a giggle was raised, hysterically, where it had least right to be; sometimes a point of exceeding fineness made no mark whatever, and Morton writhed in chagrin on her behalf. He thought how a single uncongenial personality in a little group, off the stage, would freeze this wonderful Felicity into stiff silence, and could not comprehend how the artist passion that was in her could overleap all bounds when she trod the boards; how the woman who quailed before a parlorful, who shrank from a misunderstanding dinner-partner, could forget everything, when she was acting, but the part she played.

When the final curtain fell, he hesitated a moment, pondering whether he should go back and speak to her, try to tell her how he had thrilled with the wonder of her work, or go home, and leave the telling for to-morrow when he might lunch with her, perhaps. There was never any chance of seeing her alone, after the play. Always, some one was with her—Vincent or Celeste or Mr. Leffler, or some one else—and con-



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versation with her was general, never intimate. That she was lonely, he knew, but there was no getting at her in her loneliness; she could have no recourse from it without inviting calumny. If she could have cared for the noisy pleasures of her garish world, she might have gone far without causing censure. But the things she liked to do were all impossible to her because they were, for a great actress, unconventional.

She would have liked to go to the woods with him, one of these warm, Spring days, and hunt for hepaticas, and talk, and eat sandwiches out of a paper box. Yes, she would have liked to stop in some small, quiet German garden, as they came in from the suburbs, and sit out at a white-painted table under a tree and drink a glass of beer and watch the people who came and went, and speculate about them—as Balzac had speculated about “the little men” of the rue Lesdiguères, the great army of the unknown, each of whom was a maker of history.

She would have liked—ah! Morton knew many things she would have liked; the blood of The Old Man was in his veins, and he understood; but they were all taboo to her.

He could go back and see her now. He could wait a minute at the stage entrance, while the door-keeper took back his name and returned with word bidding him come in. He could thread his

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way across the stage with its seeming confusion which was not confusion but the perfection of order. He could stand outside her dressing-room door while marble palaces and forest green-woods vanished into the flies above his head, and watch actors and actresses, "supers" and scene-shifters, skurrying away from work as fast as they could, away from the world of glamour which was work to them, to the world of actuality and pleasure. And by and by he could step into Felicity's cluttered room and hold her hand for a fraction of a second, and Celeste would remove a big make-up box from a wooden chair so he could sit down. And there, while two maids folded and put away the panoply of the stage, and the manager of the theatre interrupted every minute with a request to present somebody, and Mr. Leffler came in and out with business messages, and Vincent stood by, chatting with everybody, he could see Felicity, and tell her he liked her play. No! he would not go; it was only an aggravation to him and could not, presumably, be any pleasure to her.

Meanwhile, back of the drop curtain, precisely those things were happening which Morton knew so well. Finally, nearly every one was gone, and Felicity was free to go too. Vincent had long been waiting impatiently to keep his supper engagement, but would not go and leave Felicity in the theatre. She walked to the hotel when possi-

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ble, by preference, and he usually walked with her as far as the hotel door. To-night, however, she was very tired, and said she would ride; so a cab was waiting for her and Vincent lingered to put her into it. There were half a dozen men still present who could have done it just as well, and would have done it gladly, but this was one of Vincent's little niceties—quite an article in his strictly-observed code of "the decent thing to do." It was not contrary to the spirit of the code, though, to be rather fretfully in haste about doing it.

Still, gayety was in the air to-night, and Vincent, with all his impatience, was in overflowing good spirits as he came down the short flight of steps inside the stage entrance and stepped into the dim alley, with its solitary light above the theatre door. Felicity was immediately behind him, and the cab was standing close to the curb. As Vincent reached forward to open the carriage door, he turned sharply to his right, instinctively, as one scents danger, and caught the flash of steel in the semi-darkness. With lightning quickness he threw himself back a step, between Felicity and the sinister thing, and in that same fraction of a second there was a report, a puff of smoke that quickly lost itself in the current of air blowing through the alley, and Vincent sank heavily to the pavement.

In a twinkling, the driver was off his box and

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grappling with Jack Ashley, and a dozen theatre employes were on the scene. For a moment or two, which seemed an eternity, the one idea was directed toward the drunken assailant, to prevent his escape. Then everybody seemed at once to remember Vincent and his need, and turned to him. Felicity, without uttering a sound but one low moan of horror, had dropped on her knees and almost caught him as he fell. There she knelt, when they turned to him, holding his head on her knee, apparently insensible of what had happened, or at least of the full horror of it, and acting in pure instinct in gathering him to her.

When they picked him up and carried him back into the theatre, she followed mechanically, in a daze. Celeste, meeting her, screamed that her dress was soaked with blood, and Felicity, who always had a sick terror at the sight of blood, looked down at it unflinchingly. Celeste fainted, and Felicity walked past her indifferently, leaving who would to care for her, and followed the bearers into Vincent's dressing-room, where they laid him on the floor until one or two stage-hands, hunting frantically for a couch in the property room, should find him better comfort.

Police headquarters was not a stone's throw distant and guardians of the law swarmed over to make sure of vengeance for the law's breaking. When they arrived, Felicity was kneeling on the

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floor beside her husband, trying to stanch the flow of blood with towels. "If you were any good," she flamed out at them, fiercely, unreasonably—her grief finding, as with so many gentle souls, its only expression in rage—"you wouldn't leave a beast like that at large, to do a deed like this!"

Within ten minutes there appeared the house physician from a hotel near by. He said there was no use in moving Vincent to a hospital; it would only cause him great agony—as he appeared to be semi-conscious—and could not do the least good. "He can't live an hour," the doctor whispered to the police sergeant. Felicity's keen ears caught the whisper.

"Can't you do a thing?" she asked, quietly, "not a thing?"

The doctor shook his head. "I'm sorry," he said, lamely.

"Then please," she ordered rather than requested, "clear all these people out of here—all of them. I want to be alone with him."

The doctor looked inquiringly at the officer, who nodded acquiescence, and in silence they withdrew, driving the little rabble that filled the doorway before them, and closing the door of the tiny room on the woman of the wondrous smile and that debonair gentleman, her husband.

In a minute, the doctor knocked. "A couch has been found," he said; "it may make him a little

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more comfortable—in any case, it is more fitting——”

“Certainly.”

And when they had lifted him upon it, she busied herself for a moment with adjusting the cushions beneath his head. Then, when the door was closed again, she slipped to the floor and, crouching there, laid her head close to him, her warm cheek touching his inert hand, and there sat, marvelling at the strange matter-of-factness of it all, the absence of hysteria, of all those feelings and actions ordinarily described as dramatic. This was her clearest consciousness—the undramatic quality of the scene she was living through; and beneath that, a wonder that she should think of such a thing at such a time! Did people never really suffer in tremendous crises? Or did a merciful Providence dull them into insensibility like this? Was it all a mistake, attributing poignant feeling and expressive action to persons undergoing great experiences?

Afterwards — always afterwards — Felicity found herself unable to forget the curious insistence of that strange questioning which seemed to occupy her numbed brain while she sat there on the floor of Vincent's dressing-room, with the motley little throng just outside the door, and waited for him to die.

Presently, she felt his hand flutter beneath her

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cheek, and she looked up quickly, to find him looking at her. He tried to smile, when he caught her eager look, but it was a pitiful ghost of Vincent's gay smile. Then her tears came in a flood.

"Oh, Vincent," she sobbed, burying her head beside him, "why did you do it? how can you forgive me?"

"It wasn't—anything," he whispered, faintly. "I'm glad—I could do it—for you. It wasn't much—don't cry—it was only—the decent—thing to—do. It seems as if—we fellows—who are not very—steady or—or good, I guess, get—a chance—sometimes—at the end. Maybe it—counts—to us—maybe it—makes us—square——"

His eyes closed with the exhaustion of his effort, and she thought he was gone. Rising hastily to her feet, she bent over him in a passion of tenderness, calling him back.

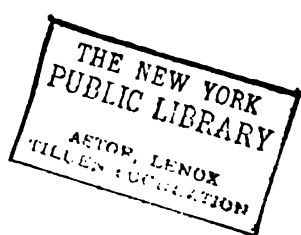
"Vincent!" she entreated, fondling his face, raining kisses on his closed eyes, on his lips, on his forehead, "Vincent! don't go! Stay with me—I need you so! Oh, God! let him stay with me—I need him so—he's all I have—I'm all alone!"

The doctor tapped gently at the door. She was so quiet he feared she might have succumbed to the shock and fainted.

"Come!" she said, and he opened the door softly. She was standing by the couch, looking



"Vincent!" she entreated. "Vincent! don't go!"



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down at Vincent; her face was tear-stained, but she was very quiet. "I think he's gone," she said.

He lifted the hand her cheek had lain against and felt for a pulsebeat; there was sufficient answer to her fears in the reverence with which he laid it down again. "Shall I send your maid, Mrs. Delano?" he asked, with respectful solicitude.

That hurt. The suggestion that she could only wish to leave him now, seemed cruel.

"I want to stay with him, please," she petitioned, her mouth so tremulous she could scarcely articulate.

"After a while," he replied, gently.

She understood, and yielded. Across the stage, in her own dressing-room, she sat before the glass and stared dully at her own reflection. Celeste was snuffling miserably, and in tones of sharp irritation, Felicity ordered her to be quiet.

There was a magazine lying on her dressing table, a dog-eared popular magazine the maids had been reading, with pictures of actresses for its chief illustrative feature; there was a picture of herself among the lot, and Felicity looked at it with an apparent interest deeper than she had ever shown for anything of the kind before. Then she turned to a story and began to read, reading faithfully, every word, and clearly "sensing it" all, after a fashion—yet every moment acutely con-

Felicity

scious of the ghostly stage just beyond, and the stark figure across those silent reaches.

It was nearly two hours later when the doctor came to her. Everything that could be done was done, now. Peacefully, in his last sleep, lay the blithe gentleman who had stood laughing in this doorway of hers an incredibly short while—or was it an eternity?—ago; across the street in a cell at the Central Police Headquarters, Jack Ashley sat with his head in his hands, staring into the darkness and muttering regret that he hadn't "got her."

Now the question was, what to do with Vincent's body. Hotels are not kindly disposed toward the dead, and the doctor suggested that the body be taken to the chapel of the undertaker. But from this Felicity shrank in tremendous protest.

"I want him where I can be with him all the time—all the time that's left," she said.

The doctor pondered. "Have you any friends who might be willing to have him taken to their house?" he asked.

Felicity thought, to no purpose for a few moments; she could hardly be sure, just at first, where she was. Then, "There's Morton Allston," she said, "he lives here and would—yes, I'm sure he would be willing."

Morton had no telephone, and there must needs be a messenger sent to him. It was over an hour

Vincent is "Made Square"

before the messenger returned, bringing Morton with him. But Felicity, sitting by Vincent, was unconscious of the passing of time.

The chill dawn was breaking when Morton led her from the theatre and put her into a carriage with Celeste to be driven to his home. Behind them, travelling at a respectful pace, came the undertaker's wagon with Vincent's body.

Upstairs in the quiet room where Sadie's spirit had gone fluttering out and where her body had lain at rest in the first hours of the separation, they laid poor Vincent, sheeted and still.

When he was left alone, when the last alien touch was withdrawn from him for a while, Morton led Felicity to the door and, opening it for her, closed it softly between him and her and left her alone with her dead.

Downstairs, he talked with Celeste—said the house was at Mrs. Delano's disposal and that he would be at her call, in his office or at his club. He suggested that Felicity be persuaded, if possible, to rest, and showed Celeste where to find wine and brandy in case her mistress would take either. He gave some last directions to his sleepy servants, and was gone—with the heaviest heart he had ever known, because he could not comfort that stricken woman upstairs in the shadow, the Great Shadow.





PART III

**OPENING AT BRIARWOOD, MISSISSIPPI, IN
MARCH, 1898**



CHAPTER XXII

SOMETHING SET APART

BRIARWOOD PLANTATION was looking its loveliest for the mistress who so seldom saw it. Three years ago she had come here and brought her husband's body to lie beside her parents in the tiny plantation burial plot; and here she had rested and tried to recover from the shock of his death. But her broken engagements, her idle company, haunted her, and she dreamed, nights, of the horrors to come—of a murder trial in which she must testify, of the visiting of justice in a hideous form on the murderer, of the acute pain of facing audiences again, of encountering people with sad or merely curious knowledge in their eyes. It was a nightmare, that visit, saved from utter dreadfulness only by the hours she spent at Vincent's grave, hours when he seemed far, far nearer to her than ever he had seemed in the laughing, care-free reality of life.

Since then, she had gone on, somehow, staggering at first, groping, stumbling, but persistent, incredibly persistent. There was nothing for her in rest, in surcease of labors. "If I were happy I

Felicity

might rest," was her reply to all entreaties, "but I dare not stop. Work is all that's left to me."

So she had kept going, God only knew how; had kept going until she found peace. Then, when that tragic restlessness gave way to something gentler, the power that had kept her active seemed to be gone, and she collapsed. People only marvelled that she had kept the fateful hour at bay so long.

First there was the hospital—wonderful! with the insight it gave her into a great new world, the World of Pain. And then there was the sanitarium—wonderful, too, with its world of people who suffered in body because they suffered in mind; whose hearts, all, were ill at ease, and so the doctors said they had "nerves." Felicity was keenly interested in both places, so keenly that the doctors were unanimous in declaring neither was the place for her. She must get beyond the range of these ardent human interests, if possible; she must have rest.

This she sought at Briarwood, taking with her Frances Allston and her charge, the little Sarah Frances, now nearly nine years old. They went down the river from Memphis by packet, debarking at Briarwood landing just as Robert Fergus had done when he went for his bride, nearly forty years before. It was January, and such winter as Mississippi knows, not more severe than North-

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ern springs, but chill enough, most days, for big open fires on the hearths of Briarwood House, though there was never a day when there were not some flowers blooming in the sunny corners of the old-fashioned gardens.

Felicity throve splendidly, with a granddaughter of Zilianne's to cook for her, and in February, when Mardi Gras was over and New Orleans had put on her Lenten ashes, they went down to the charming old city and "lazed" happily up and down its quaint, historic streets, buying curios with marvellous "hand-made histories," as The Old Man used to say, acquiring white rabbits and small green paroquets and fluffy sable and white collie pups for which they had no immediate housing, in the story-book-like animal shops on Royal Street. They hunted for and, to their infinite delight, found the macaroni factory over which had lived that mysterious teacher of fencing; and Felicity declared it was the same blind white horse that turned the rude machinery; nor would hear to the contrary. She was surprised, she said, not to find her old master of the foils; twenty-five years could not have added appreciably to his age or his "withered-upness," she maintained.

Once, in the golden, olden days she was re-living, they had gone to Bay St. Louis, she and Aunt Elie and "the Witch of Endor," and it had been the sleepest, restfullest time she had ever

Felicity

known. There was a yellow dog, she said, who was sleeping in the middle of the shell road along which they were driving, close by the azure Gulf, and they had to drive 'round him, at some inconvenience, for he would not move. Felicity insisted that she wanted to see that dog again. "Oh, I know he's there!" she said; "still sleeping in that warm sunshine! I've thought of him a thousand times, I guess—and envied him." So they went to the Bay, and there was, if not the identical dog, at least his great-great-great-great-grandson, Felicity computed.

Early in March they returned to Briarwood and found it looking its spring loveliest for their welcome. Narcissus, blooming in magnificent profusion, bordered the uneven brick walks around the house and glorified the jagged terraces of the old, unkempt sunken garden whose heyday was half a century in the past. Violets grew thick along the trellises under the broad galleries, and already, in the sunniest places, the peach trees were in bloom. Coming up from the moss-hung live-oaks, the mammoth palms, the abysmal cypress swamps of the far south, one felt a delicate loveliness about the bloom at Briarwood that gave an exquisite delight.

They had been back but a few days when word came from Morton that he was coming south on a business trip, to Memphis and New Orleans, and "if urged" would stop at Briarwood over Sunday.

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The urging must have been sufficient, for he came Saturday morning, by the Valley train, and they all met him and escorted him in state to the house. It was his first visit to a plantation, and Briarwood, managed by a capable, profit-sharing planter and financed with Felicity's ample means, was now one of the model plantations of the State. The "quarters" were limited, in this latter-day régime, to the cabins of the house servants and a few others; the rest of the eight hundred blacks who lived in feudal fief of the broad acres were scattered broadcast over them, each on his own holding. But the plantation store provided a meeting place that left little to be desired on the part of the stranger seeking sights of plantation life; and altogether there was a good deal of the old South to be experienced, for the blacks were free in name more than in capacity for freedom, and practically were the same care as if they had been chattels.

All day Morton spent most interestedly going over the place, now with the planter, now with Felicity, always with Sarah Frances. In the evening, after supper, while Mrs. Allston was giving Sarah Frances her bath and putting her to bed, Felicity took Morton to the store to see the sights of that great trading time. Afterwards, they strolled through the quarters and listened to the plaintive twanging of a love-sick swain's guitar and

Felicity

to the livelier whanging of negro dance music and the rhythm of shuffling feet. Soft voices were raised everywhere, in laughter and in conversation, and in song; even the squealing pickaninnies had a cry that was not harsh.

As they climbed the hill on which the stately pillared old white house stood, they halted, near the top, to gaze in ecstasy at the mighty Mississippi, a glittering silver flood under the nearly full moon.

Felicity caught at her breast with her clenched hand in a little, peculiar gesture she had when her delight, mounting into rapture, threatened almost to suffocate her. "Oh," she whispered, "isn't it wonderful?"

He did not answer; the sweetness of the night intoxicated him beyond power of speech. The air was warm, with a softness about it that was not yet languorous, and full of an almost piercing sweetness. At their feet, the old, sunken garden, with its gleaming white narcissus, spoke eloquently of a storied past. From the distant quarters, the notes of song and of stringed instruments came wafting in plaintive diminuendo, melted, all, into that only half-sad minor strain so expressive of the negro race. Above their heads, the pine trees whispered, and the ghost of a breeze that was spent far away, rustled the great bunches of mistletoe in the bare branches of the monster oaks.

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Felicity sat down where she was, there could be no better vantage point, and Morton, dropping down beside her, kept silence for a long while. Presently, watching her half-averted face intently in the silvery light, he saw two tears trickle slowly down.

"What is it—dear?" he asked, leaning toward her.

"It's so beautiful it—hurts," she said, laying her closed hand again at her breast, as if the pain were there.

"I wonder," he said, after a while, "if it can be as beautiful—There?"

She shook her head. "I don't know. I can't imagine our human nature, however it's altered by the great change, in the midst of continual beauty like this. We—I know so well how it's the fleetingness, the rarity of moments like this, that give them their ecstasy. You see how old I am! I'm old enough not to wish this could last always."

"And old enough, aren't you?" he added, soberly, "*I* am—not to regret any of the pain you've suffered that's helped to make this moment wonderful?"

She looked up at him quickly, intent, eager—confidence and questioning rushing at once to her lips and struggling, each, for first expression. And then she caught her breath, half fearfully, paralyzed with the sudden rapture of this realization:

Felicity

Morton had his father's stature and was big of frame and strongly built, but his features he owed mostly to The Old Man, and never had Felicity marked the resemblance as to-night; as he sat there, in that faint, fairy light, the dreams of long, wistful years seemed to have come true and he who had irradiated life for her seemed to have come back to her, with a difference, a marvellous difference.

"Oh," she said, speaking less to him, really, than to herself, as if she were tracing the steps by which he had come to her, "you know the value of pain, of hurt, of loneliness, of disappointment? You have wrestled with all these angels and refused to let them go until they blessed you? You feel it's wonderful to have lived and—found things out? to have lived and learned to triumph?"

She spoke low, and brokenly, but the ring in her voice at the end had a thrill in it like nothing else that Morton could remember to have heard, ever. He had not seen her in nearly a year, and not often, all told, since Vincent's death. He had known a little of the struggle she went through after the tragedy, but more by hearsay and by tacit understanding than by word of mouth to him. There had never, really, been anything even bordering on confidence between them since that night, six years ago, when she had taken him off guard and wrung from him that look of anguished appeal.

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He had wondered—wistfully all the time some of the time while he stood aloof and not try to help her—if she had interpreted her look aright; but her manner was inscrutable. She was a little surprised, to-night, at the quickness of her response to his mood for confidence.

“It is wonderful,” he said, speaking slowly with a stumbling sort of hesitancy in sharp contrast with her quick eagerness, “I don’t know that I have triumphed—don’t feel that I have—I have learned to endure and—and even to be glad when I was called on to do it. That is, not glad—that seems like forgetting *her* suffering. I can see what it has done for me—what I have become. I couldn’t have been except for little Sadie’s dependence on me. I did a little for her, but not much, I’m afraid, but what I could—what I know! what I could—but it wasn’t anything. It was what she did for me—my debt to her is all—unpayable.”

“I know,” she said, “it is one of the most wonderful things like what childhood does for us, only it is quite different. It says, in the Bible, something about God having chosen the weak things of the world to confound the mighty. I think He does more—He chooses them to be the mighty; they are His great illuminators. They tell truths about the spirit. We despise them because we’re blind, foolish, untaught. I’ve seen

Felicity

things, in the last year or two! Why, all the bravery and sweetness in the world are born of the weak things and their claim on the mighty! All the resolute souls have been helped by the irresolute! And I think—yes, I believe I know—that God loves the irresolute souls and even honors them, just as well. They do their work in the world, they breed strength and foster tenderness—almost lay down their lives, we might say, that others through them may live the more abundantly. Oh, don't you believe it's all counted to them for honor, somehow, somewhere? That somehow it's all made glorious to them for their vicarious sacrifice, and when we see them again, we shall understand?"

Her tears were falling fast, now, and Morton's own eyes were blinding full.

"Oh, these past two years," she went on, "what they've been to me! First, I struggled so fiercely—not against suffering, so much as against having the world know I suffered. I resented pity so! I, who was used only to—well, to what I called triumph. People pried into my private life, they discussed it in print—you know! They shouted my sacredest affairs from the housetops. It was horrible! I hated the whole world! And then—I began to feel the difference in people; they showed me, in spite of my sullenness, a side of themselves, in my sorrow, they'd never shown me in my pros-

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perity. Lots of people did the tenderest things for me—people who had seemed, before, as if they'd like nothing better than to see me lose my pitiful eminence. You see, I did things for them in my weakness and my hurt that I'd never been able to do for them in my success—I brought out their sympathy, where before I'd brought out only their envy; I was worth more to them in my abasement than in my pride—did them a sweeter service. And then it began to come home to me what The Old Man had said to me, when I didn't understand, about this very thing. I remembered the summer of '81, when I was back north for my vacation from the frontier circuit, and we were at Nantucket, and the news came of Garfield's assassination. We were sitting down on the sands, The Old Man and I, and he said, 'Well, if Garfield dies, he'll owe his canonization to that poor fool's bullet. Providence was kind even to mighty Lincoln—and kinder to his uncomprehending country—when poor, beautiful, misguided Wilkes Booth sped that bullet into the greatest brain of modern times. If Lincoln had lived, the North would have turned and rended him, sure, for his bigness of purpose toward the conquered South; the very people who wept for him would have cursed him for a magnanimity they couldn't understand. That poor boy gave him, an idol, to the nation, and saved him the greatest sorrow of his

Felicity

life. It's always a wonderful gift to people to let 'em be sorry for you,' he went on. 'And it was a great thing for the nation, just at that time, to have that tremendous sorrow. Now, I'm not much on religion by the preachers' way of thinking, but I've seen with my own eyes most of the great truths proved, and I know it's true of more than God Almighty—that it's true of the least of us all—that about "And I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me." You can't draw 'em any other way; your triumphs only make 'em mean and envious—that's human nature—and even your private griefs don't move 'em. Gethsemane doesn't count, to the world—it isn't enough; it's Golgotha that moves hearts, and you've got to be willing, as He was, to drink the whole cup, to the dregs, that the world may weep with you and be saved. Not all of us are chosen for "lifting up"—though I think all of us would pray to be, if we were wise. I've never been chosen. The things I've suffered have been things the world did not know about. I've made people laugh, and I've made them cry, but I've never made them sorry for me. I'd have had it otherwise, if I could; I've envied Charles Lamb the shadow of the madhouse—the world owes a great deal to that. Don't you shirk the "lifting up" if it comes to you,' he said, 'be glad if your sorrows can help others, instead of helping only you. There's nothing you can do for the

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world like putting up a plucky fight against heavy odds—odds it can see, and understand!’ But I wasn’t glad, at first; I didn’t understand. Then, things began to come home to me. I remembered Clo Detmar, that Memorial Day by his grave. ‘Maybe you’ve got your troubles like the rest of us,’ she said, ‘but we can’t see ’em, and so we can’t be sorry for ’em.’ I did have them, of course, but I had so much superficial fortune that people were blinded by the glitter of it and hated me because I had so much. They didn’t know how the very temperament that made me famous, made me suffer intolerably. They didn’t know that my success made me so lonely I could hardly bear it. They didn’t know any of these things—they never know them, somehow. But they knew I blamed myself for Vincent’s death—and that softened all hearts to me, it seemed. Since then, I’ve got closer, oh! ever so much closer to the heart of things. I know, now, how lonely everybody is—everybody! each with his own heart hunger that’s never satisfied. And when I play to people now, I play to lonely folks—I send my heart out to them across the footlights, and I can feel their hearts reaching across to me; they know I’m sad and lonely, too. But I’m not lonely, now, as I used to be! I have this new sense of belonging to a big, human family—of being, not apart, but just one of the many, many. See,” she finished, after a

Felicity

little pause, "what Vincent did for me with his great sacrifice!"

Her face was uplifted as she spoke and, all tear-stained as it was, Morton thought he had never seen such a look of radiant happiness.

"Felicity," he whispered, and stole a hand, almost fearsomely, to hers on the grass beside her. That was all—the understanding, the pleading, the denial of worthiness and the expression of great longing, were all in the tone. The hand over which his closed, trembled, then lay still under his clasp. The silence that fell on them was fuller of understanding than any words could have been.

That night when Felicity went to her room she paused at Frances' door and tapped, ever so lightly. Bidden to "come in," she went over to the bed and, bending over, said:

"Kiss me good-night—Mother—for I'm the happiest woman in God's wide world to-night!"

Late Sunday afternoon Frances wound up a fine long visit with Morton by saying:

"Now, go find her, dear. She slipped away to give us this opportunity, but I know where she is, and I know she's waiting for you. This is her favorite hour of all the day, and I know she wants you to enjoy it with her. You'll find her—you know where?"

He nodded, kissed her, and was gone. It had

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been a glorious day, all sunshine and fragrance and rapturous companionship. There was summer warmth in the air and more than summer beauty in the bloom, that thrilled Morton with its delicacy as no luxuriance of full-leaved summer had ever done.

They had risen betimes, that morning, and taken an early train into Vicksburg—along with a hundred or so of the Briarwood negroes bent on a holiday—where they hired a trap and a driver-guide and drove miles over the lines of investment and defence which Congress was then considering the advisability of making into the macadam roadways of a great National Park.

Morton was deeply interested in the natural memorials of the siege, and Felicity loved the careful explicitness with which he tried to make it all plain to Sarah Frances. Poor Morton! He was almost a stranger to his own child, and Felicity's heart ached as she noted his rather elaborate courtesy to the little girl, so different from that confidential companionship that should have been theirs and that, alas! seemed as little imminent as ever.

There was a vast tangle of affairs that neither she nor Morton had spoken of last night—not because they forgot them; they were not young enough for that!—but because they were fain to snatch that evening's ecstasy clear of all question-

Felicity

ing. If they had been very much younger, they might have believed that all life would be like those moonlit moments; if they had been only a little less schooled than they were, they would have felt so sure the joy could not last, they would have killed it with their doubting. But they knew—these two—that it was one of those transfigurations, given at some time to most lives, that must be received on the mountain-top, care-free and isolate, even though one must come immediately down and resume ministry to the less-inspired. Neither of them had any expectation that life would repeat for them the glory of those moments, yet to neither of them would life ever again be the same as before the memory of a little hour made their union indissoluble; and, secure in that sense of oneness, they were willing to take up, today, the practical possibilities.

After their long drive they had caught a train back to Briarwood in time for a late dinner at home. Then, everybody took a nap, or pretended to, and when Felicity came downstairs at five o'clock, and found Morton and his mother and daughter together, Sarah Frances on her father's knee, she stole softly away without disturbing them, and took her way along the hill-crest to the little enclosure where Vincent lay at rest beside that Robert Fergus to whom he would have been so strange a creature.

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Alec McClintock had chosen this spot with loving care, and had thrilled with a fierce joy it was well Robert Fergus could not guess, when the Confederate defence of the river chose a spot just outside the burial enclosure to set one of its best guns, commanding the mighty waterway for several miles in each direction. It was no sacrilege to him that the cannon's roar should reverberate above Cecile's grave and her mother's. God knew it was in defence of such sacred spots, not for their niggers, nor even for their state rights, that he and many another man were fighting.

Up here, where the cannon had been set because it commanded so great a sweep of river, one got a view of whose glory Felicity never tired. She had seen many, very many, of the world's storied splendors, but none of them gave her the rapture this stretch of country gave, seen from this sacred spot.

She was sitting, when Morton came to find her, not in the enclosure, but outside, on the very crest of the hill, close beside the old gun which the Confederates had spiked and buried in the river before the narrowing investment lines had closed in on them. Long after the war Alec McClintock had the old gun dragged from the ooze beneath the swift, swerving current, and restored to its place of former command; and now, in this month

Felicity

of March, '98, bluebirds were nesting in the silenced cannon's mouth.

The air was vocal with the evensong of birds as Felicity sat there. Mating was in its glory, new nests were everywhere, maternal hovering and paternal pride in new responsibility, were flaunting themselves on every hand.

Not a stone's throw south of where she sat, the ground dipped suddenly, precipitously, into one of the deep ravines or "bottoms" characteristic of this countryside; and from far down in the cane-brake that choked the lush bottom, she could hear the musical tinkle of a cowbell as some soft-stepping bossy strayed homeward for milking time.

Other sounds there were none, though when a river steamer passed, as it sometimes did at the hour of the afterglow—its red and green bow lights reflected in long, wavering lines in the glassy waters—she could hear the "chug, chug" of its escape valve and even, at times, the chanting sing-song of the negro roustabouts.

Across the mighty current lay the Louisiana shores, very flat and low, their dense woods freshly green and growing greener almost by the minute. Immediately below her, on the "flats," close to the current with its unpredictable whimsies, was a strip of land inconceivably rich in fertility but beyond all words precarious, for no one could know at what time the river would wipe it out of existence in

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a night, in an hour. Still, there were little, white-washed cabins on its miry, cotton-furrowed land, and tiny peach trees all a-bloom, and even a weeping willow, vivid in its new emerald green which showed sharply against the black, oozy earth and the brown of the dead cottonstalks.

Morton said not a word as he came up and sat beside her. There seemed, at times, so little need of speech between them that words could only spoil the perfection of their communion.

The majestic river appeared without a ripple, so still it flowed seaward. The sun, slanting low over the Louisiana tree-tops, seemed to decline reluctantly on so perfect a day. From the cabins below them, smoke spirals curled into the still air, telling of wood thrown on smouldering fires for the suppers of big and little blacks who had basked, all day, in the warm sunshine.

"It hardly seems possible, does it," said Morton, after a while, his mind still dwelling on the sights of the morning and the story of the great siege, "that only a generation ago men climbed these steep hillsides while cannon belched death into their very faces; and tunnelled underground to blow up whole hills, with their batteries; and did all those other things we know about. I don't think I ever saw anything more eloquent of peace than this—" indicating with a motion of his head the scene outspread before them.

Felicity

"I suppose," she answered, slowly, "our sense of the peace of it all is—well, as great as it is, because we know what pain was here once—what blood flowed on these hillsides. Peace, great peace, always comes out of great pain, I guess—out of strife, and pain, and—and death. One understands—so many things—when one has—suffered."

He put an arm around her and drew her close, not trusting himself to answer. As they sat in silence, the sun sank, leaving a sky brilliantly gold and red. In a few moments, the silver flood stretching mile on mile beneath them, was incarnadined, like a sea of blood.

"Look!" she whispered. And he understood.

Then the crimson paled to rose, shading to amethyst. The world was graying into the soft monotone of dusk; only the pink of the peach-blossoms was faintly colorful when one's gaze turned landward from the Apocryphal glories of river and sky. The birdsong was hushed, now, the straying cows were all herded for the evening milking, the stillness had become profound. Where the last touches of color had faded from the west, the pale stars were shining.

Then Sarah Frances came along the bluff calling, "Father! Father!"

"Here, dear!" said Felicity, answering for him. And, holding a hand of each, Sarah Frances led

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them home to tea. On the front gallery she released their hands, to run in ahead of them and announce their coming.

"I found 'em, Gran'ma," she cried, "out by the cannon—talking!"

In the long hall, just outside the dining-room door, Felicity looked into Morton's eyes for one instant. "We weren't talking," she said, "and we should have been."

He understood.

"And you must go to-night?"

Morton nodded. He was not a man of many words, but, somehow, one did not miss anything that was necessary to his understanding—his silences were eloquent. And there was that in his look as he met her inquiring glance, which thrilled her—that which said, as no words could have said, "What matter? There are things to be said, and I'm willing enough to say them, when a time comes; but you're mine, and nothing can keep you from me—so what is there to talk about, after all?"

After he was gone that night, Felicity and Frances sat late—talking. "I don't see what's to become of us," said Felicity, very soberly. "I,—God knows how little I care for the—the emoluments of my work, how I hate many of the things about it; but it's my life—I have to do the work, not for what it brings me, but for the sheer

Felicity

necessity of doing it. Why, I'm restless now, restless as I can be, because I've learned so much this winter that I crave expression for. I've simply never played '*Toinette*—never played it! I didn't know how! though the world thought I did. And I've never more than half played *Marianna*, or that wonderful creature, *Ellen Mary*. I've got to play 'em! Not to put my fresh knowledge into their portrayal would be like—like losing speech and the power to write, at a time when you're bursting with great, new ideas. I have to do it! If it costs me everything else I care for on earth, I have to do it—that's the joy and the pity of this thing that's in me! I want companionship more than I want anything on this earth, or in Heaven, but I've got to do my work. If I took companionship at the cost of my work, I couldn't be happy—no, nor if I took it at the cost of Morton's work in the world. He ought to have a home, for him and Sarah Frances, and a chance to live his life in the blessed, familiar way; he's earned it! But I can't give it to him—not now, anyway. I'm driven by this thing inside me that's stronger than I am. Oh, it's cruel, this way my feet are set in! Other ways are not so hard—don't cost so much! Women who write and paint and do other things, accomplishing things, can have homes and husbands and—children. But there's never been a time when I

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didn't belong to some one more than to myself—when I wasn't under contract to managers for years ahead; when my retirement, even for a season, into home life, wouldn't have worked hardship to scores of people whose very bread and butter was dependent on my presence on the stage! Look what this winter has cost Garvish, and a host of others! Now, even if I didn't have this thing inside of me that makes me work, I'd feel as if I owed my best efforts to Garvish for several years, to repay him for this. I don't love Garvish, but I love my own peace of mind too well to try to be happy while I'm neglecting my obligations. Then think of my marrying Morton and feeling I ought to be making a home for him and his child—wanting to be with him, more than I want anything else!—and going on with my work, because I have to. Doesn't it seem as if Fate mocked me? I don't expect to be happy, continuously happy! Nobody is, that I know of, or ever has been. And it isn't myself I'm thinking of—it's Morton, and Sarah Frances!"

"Don't you suppose Morton has thought of all these things?" said Frances—who knew that he had.

"Yes, I know he must have thought of them."

"But they didn't deter him?"

"No." Felicity smiled exquisitely, as she shook her head.

Felicity

"And you know that he hasn't any idea of asking you to sacrifice everything for him? You know that's not like Morton?"

"No, he won't ask anything; but I shall feel the demand, even if he doesn't make it—or allow it."

"Oh, my dearie," cried Frances, "I'm too old for such a hard nut!"

"I wonder," mused Felicity, "what The Old Man would have said."

"I don't think that's hard to guess."

"Please guess, then!"

"Well, I think he would have said—can't you see how he would have narrowed his eyes, in that quizzical way he had of looking at you, and drawn in the corners of his mouth, as he said, 'The meanest sin is mistrust. Nothing that can happen to you from over-reaching is so deadly as what happens to you from refusing to reach high for fear you fall.' Can't you shut your eyes and hear him say, in that peculiar, vibrant voice of his that made his least remark seem memorable, 'The luck o' the road, dear child! The vagabond spirit's the spirit that enriches the world, and it takes what comes, cheerily, and travels light. You can't make to-morrow—not with your best calculations; you can only take it as it comes. The past is yours, and one moment more—the present. The future's going to be rough, however carefully you plan,

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and the rough places when you come to them won't be any easier because you can remember how dear you paid in the hope of escaping them.' Don't you feel he'd have said just this? Oh, my dear—" Frances broke down, sobbing; the fervor of her pleading had been too much for her.

Felicity comforted her without speaking—probably the best comfort, always. After a while she said, "I didn't know you cared—so much!"

"I never cared more about anything," returned Frances, warmly, "and I can't tell whether I care most for Morton's sake, or for yours, or for my own—or for father's. He would have loved it so—and never had a bit of patience with your hesitation!"

"Yes," murmured Felicity, with a wonderful look on her face, "and Morton will have none, either! We haven't mentioned these things, but I know perfectly well that not one of them makes the smallest bit of difference to him—that's the glory of it! Or to me," she added, archly. "I guess I just talk about them to you so you'll know I'm aware o' them. That was my New England conscience that was talking," she went on, with the delicious whimsicality of manner which always characterized her keen findings about herself—her artistic appreciation of her human inconsistencies—"the part of me that would have been a Yankee spinster, thriving on renunciation, like dear Aunt

Felicity

Elie! I'm glad for that part of me!" she cried, her eyes shining with unshed tears, "it has helped me to understand great things—great things! But I'm glad for the other part of me, too—for the Cavalier spirit, the wonderful apprenticeship in vagabondage under that great Old Man—for the part of me that loves and trusts and will not be denied!"

There was something superb in her tone and gesture—in her beauty and her passionateness, in the lovely traces of suffering she wore at once with the triumph of love, of conscious power—that made Frances Allston's pulses throb. She was so much alive, this rare, sweet Felicity! She called to one's deadening sensibilities and made them flame, again, into acute desire.

"Felicity," said Frances, looking at her, "you are something set apart to a special purpose. You make life more vivid, more desirable, than any one I've ever known—not even excepting father. You—you must go on with this great ministry of yours, dear, as long as you can. You must sigh for the common lot and not have it—because it is your exquisite gift to kindle the sharers of the common lot—like me—with a new sense of what life may be. We need you, dear—it's so easy to grow uninspired! And it's worth a sacrifice, to be this to the world!"

CHAPTER XXIII

"THE BRUSHWOOD PILES"

FELICITY had been booked for a long spring run in New York, concluding her season; nearly every booking of the season had had to be cancelled, after her collapse in November, but she had written from Briarwood before leaving there for New Orleans, early in February, that she felt she could play the New York engagement of eight weeks if the theatre were to be had, and Garvish could assemble a suitable company and make other arrangements.

Garvish could; it took manipulation to manage all this, but practically anything can be done for the most profitable actress on the English-speaking stage.

Accordingly, the last week of March found Felicity "tempting Providence" with the New York east winds, as her physician said. But she only laughed, knowing that the things that had made her frail and tired beyond endurance were not such winds as doctors take note of; and that,

Felicity

now she was so full of things to express, chance to express herself meant health to her, whatever winds might blow.

She opened, the first Monday in April, playing her old, familiar 'Toinette with a verve that indeed made the character seem hitherto unknown.

"She makes you feel," said a woman, coming out of the theatre that first night, "as if she'd been inside of you, and learned things about you that you thought *God* hardly knew about you, and that then she got you here and showed yourself to you—yourself and herself and 'Toinette, and the fat woman beside you, in the purple waist, and the thin girl in front, with the plain face and passionate eyes, and the lady in the box, with the blond hair and the diamond breastplate, and—all human nature; so you never can look at any of it again and see it single, in its meanness or its might, but always see it double in its weakness and its strength."

A man who knew Felicity, was just ahead of this woman, in the slow, outpouring crush, and he repeated the remark to her when he had a chance.

"Yes," she said, smiling, "that's what I try to do—though I should never have been able to describe it so fluently." Which was a bit of charming hypocrisy, for Felicity was as fluent as anybody, and knew it.

“The Brushwood Piles”

She had promised Morton she would marry him “when work was over” in early June. Then she could have her summer in Chicago, and—well, beyond that she would not try to think.

Then—why, it was the very day after her opening night—her letters to him began to take on a note of impatience that thrilled him with a deep, a wonderful delight.

“I wish you could have seen my new ‘Toinette,’” she wrote, that Tuesday when she was telling him of its triumphs, “there was so much in it that you, better than any one else, could understand—that never would have been in it save for you and your *understanding!*”

Next it was: “I am still re-investing Marianna with new knowledge. I never did justice before to Marie’s superb love; I always supposed that when she went back to her queen’s estate, the obligations she saw she could not lay aside would outweigh everything else with her, even her love. But now I don’t believe that, for I’ve come back into my kingdom, you see, and instead of my responsibilities crowding out love, they only give him a greater field for his sway; for whatever I do or sigh to leave undone, I am conscious, always, of that *one who would understand.*”

Then: “I am having a very fine time, as fine times go. There are a good many interesting people in town and I’m seeing something of a num-

Felicity

ber of them in quite delightful ways, all informal. But there's something so teasingly 'touch and go' about even the best social intercourse—something that scratches the surface of things so lightly—that it leaves one very unsatisfied. I doubt if more than two persons can ever be concerned in any real good time, any fellowship worth mentioning."

As the month wore on these little notes of half-confessed longing for him, which thrilled him more than her way of concluding a letter with "I want you, every minute!" grew more and more wistful; and toward the end of April Morton presented himself, unannounced, in New York on a Friday, to spend Saturday and Sunday with her. He saw her play 'Toinette Friday night, and after the play went home with her.

The cab that came for her she sent away, saying she preferred to walk; and together they strolled up gaudy, glittering Broadway, full of zest for its sights and sounds, its swarming human comedy, but willing to leave it all when Felicity's cross-street was reached, and to wander off into the darkness that led eastward toward Fifth Avenue—talking of many things.

At home, in her beautiful dining-room, she had a supper set out for him—ostensibly for her, too, but really for him, though he ate nearly as little as she did. Talk across a table is always worth

“The Brushwood Piles”

making a pretence for, however, and they both enjoyed it, and thought of meals on meals to come, when they would sit together in this cosy companionship. He remembered, however, that to-morrow was her day of double duty and he must not keep her up late.

It was tantalizing! She seemed to belong to the public so much and to him so little. But Morton refused to let himself think of this. If the time ever came when he could have her more fully for himself, he would rejoice; but until it came—God knew how grateful he was for the radiance she lent his life whether he was with her or not.

It was delicious, though, to have her say, when she went to the door with him to bid him good-night, in sweet, simple fashion on the threshold, “It’s so glorious to have you, dear! But how am I ever going to give you up again?”

“Only for a month—this time,” he suggested, trying to be hopeful.

“How can you say ‘only’ a month?” she asked him, with pretty reproachfulness.

“I can say it because I’ve practised it so much, I guess,” he returned, laughing. “By talking handsomely about ‘only a month,’ I almost make myself believe that it’s not such an *awful* long time!”

“Morton,” she said, suddenly changing the subject, and there was witchery in her face as she

Felicity

laughed up at him, "what a summer it's going to be! I'm going to keep house for you, with such a vengeance! I'm going to wear little 'swiss-y' aprons, with pink bows on 'em, and every day I'm going to make you a cherry pie; and when you come home, evenings, I'll be sitting on the front porch, with Sarah Frances in her little rocker beside me, and both of us'll be—*crocheting!*"

There was that beneath her conscious ridiculousness which was so wistful it brought the tears to his eyes.

"Oh, wonderful Felicity!" he murmured, holding her very close, "it doesn't seem possible!"

"What doesn't?"

"That you'll ever really be there, in my life as you've been in my dreams. I've dreamed you there so much, my Felicity, and waked, to find it only a dream—that—I don't know; I try not to be faint-hearted—but I wonder if such exquisite dreams ever come true?"

She raised her head suddenly from his breast. "Have you that fear, too?" she asked, sharply.

"Have you?" he echoed.

"It haunts me night and day," she said, simply.

"Felicity," he said, with sudden inspiration, "marry me now, dear; marry me to-morrow. It can't be any harder to leave you when I know you're my wife, and it may be easier; that taunting, tugging disbelief will leave me, perhaps. Maybe

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it's a strange request—I'd have to leave you Monday—perhaps I oughtn't to ask you, but——”

“But I want to,” she whispered.

He asked her her preferences about their wedding, but she expressed few, save as to the place.

“I'd like it to be in The Little Church Around the Corner,” she said. “I know that it's become ‘common’—kind of a Gretna Green for ill-advised marriages among theatre-folk, and all that. But I love it! I was there with The Old Man in the fall of '70 when George Holland was buried from it, and it got its familiar name. I was there, too, when dear Edwin Booth lay there. I go there a great deal, when I'm in New York, and sit in a quiet corner and—think. I love it when the afternoon sun comes pouring in the splendid Transfiguration window, and the birds are twittering their vespers in the thick vines outside. I love the Players' Club window to Booth, with its uplifting inscription to him ‘as one, in suffering all, that suffers nothing, A man that fortune's buffets and rewards Hast ta'en with equal thanks.’ If you don't mind, I'd like to slip in there, after the matinée, and come out, your wife!”

She dreaded the inevitable publicity, but at least the evening papers would not have it, and Sunday they would spend in the country where, perhaps she would not be recognized as Mrs. Allston. After

Felicity

that—well! one must “be a man” about what one could not help, as The Old Man had said.

They spent a couple of hours in the morning, wandering about the least-frequented malls and pathways of the Park, without in the least knowing, or caring, where they were—mindful, though, of the impending *matinée*. Luncheon they ate at her home, the half-companion, half-secretary, of uncertain age and unmistakable propriety, not intruding. When it was over, they drove to the theatre, where Morton left her at her request.

“I’d rather you’d be with me in the morning, and not in the theatre in the afternoon,” she said. “It seems as if I couldn’t bear the ecstasy of knowing you were there, across the footlights, waiting for me. So, whatever arrangements you have to make, please make them then.”

“And in the evening? May I come and see you act then?”

“Oh, in the evening we’ll be old married folks, and I’ll expect you to see me home from my work,” she said, her divinely conscious look belying her casual tone.

“We shall have a honeymoon of about ninety minutes,” he reminded her, “most of which will be consumed at dinner. Have you any suggestions as to where you’d like to dine?”

No; she had not. “So it’s with you,” she said.



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He was at the stage door waiting for her, with a carriage, when the last act was no more than well under way. It was nearly an hour before she appeared, sweet as a flower in her little spring street gown of pale tan, with a pink rose at her breast and another underneath the brim of her black plumed hat.

The sunshine was streaming obliquely through the glorious Transfiguration window as they took their places before the altar; the birds were caroling an evensong of spring joyousness outside, among the new-leaving vines. The witnesses were only the sexton and the organist, who interrupted his practice for this brief service.

And when they stepped out of the sweetly-still church into the quaint little yard, with the roar of Fifth Avenue's six o'clock traffic only a few feet away, Felicity said, with a look that matched her words,

“It is the Church of the Transfiguration—isn't it?”

“Send the man away, we don't want him,” she begged, as the cabman, with unwonted ceremony, got down to open the door for them.

So they wandered out, into the spring sunset, and melted into the human current flowing up Fifth Avenue. A good many people recognized Felicity, and turned to look after her. “But

Felicity

none of them," she said, " knows how happy I am. Oh, I hope other people are happy, too—happier than we can guess! "

Once or twice they stopped to look into shop windows—now at a picture, now at some antique silver, now at a splendid floral display. " Don't you always," she said, "*choose* what you'd take if the window broke, or if some one came along and offered you your pick? I always do! I could walk in and buy any of it, I suppose, but I never think of that; they wouldn't interest me if I remembered it."

She loved the swift-moving current of people, the human tide—loved to be in it and of it, to watch it and wonder about it, and feel that she understood it, and her eyes were so shining bright with the pleasurableness of this drifting that Morton felt, as he watched her, more than he had ever felt before, what that thing was in her which made her great.

" It's so wonderful," she said, " to feel that you like this, too—that I don't seem like a crazy thing to you because of my strange preferences—as I must seem to most people, I know.

" I'm glad I didn't try to choose my honeymoon," she went on, presently, " Because I couldn't ever have chosen between this and another—between this and riding on the river in a ferry-boat! No one knows how I love the river

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at evening, when the sun makes the windows opposite shine like burnished shields and whitens the dingy canvas on the fishing boats—and by and by, the lights begin to blossom in the tall buildings, and the red and green lanterns on the masts of anchored ships shine out in the pale dusk, and the ferry-boats, stealing across the big, black river, throw long, wavering lines of light on the water from their brilliant cabins—and I hang, ecstatic, over the guard rail, and am lonesome because no one but me seems agape over these things. But *you* would—wouldn't you?”

At Felicity's corner they looked down toward her house, and kept on. “Now I do begin to realize I'm on my honeymoon,” she said, delighted as a child not to know where she was going. A few minutes more, and they came to one of the quiet, uptown hotels, patronized mostly by families. Morton had his key in his pocket and did not go to the desk. It was quietly evident, however, that he was expected.

Felicity followed him down the long hall, after they left the elevator on the fourth floor, with an ecstatic sense of being led, of having her well-being supremely considered. Not her comfort, merely—some one always looked out for that; nor her health and safety—those were always valuable assets to somebody besides herself. But her happiness! Morton understood what happi-

Felicity

ness meant to her—that was the great thing about his companionship: the same things meant happiness to them both. It was unspeakably delicious to follow him, not knowing where he meant to go or what he meant to do, but sure it would be what made her happy, and, best of all, that what made her happy was what made him happy, too!

He unlocked a door and motioned her in. The twilight was quite gray, but he did not turn on the electric lights. On the hearth of the little sitting-room—not of necessity but because of things he had heard her say—a handful of fire burned; before it, two easy chairs were drawn up; through the open door of the room beyond Felicity could see her familiar dressing silver spread out to her comfort by Celeste, who had been and gone. A small table was laid for a simple dinner, and the centre of the table was gay with a bunch of pink roses.

Felicity stepped into the room, noting in a glance its conventional “hotel” appointments—like hundreds of hotel sitting-rooms she had fretted lonely hours in—and this—this wondrousness, in a touch, a single, love-inspired forethought; sinking into one of the deep chairs before the little fire, she covered her eyes with her hand as if, somehow, she feared to look again lest the vision be gone.

“‘The Brushwood Piles!’” she murmured,
“Oh, ‘The Brushwood Piles!’”



“The Brushwood Piles”

He came and knelt beside her and took her hand gently away from her face.

“Truly?” he whispered.

“Truly! It’s all as I’ve dreamed it—all here!

“When I read the story the first time,” she told him, after a while, “I was in a hotel, in Baltimore, and it was Christmas Eve—the Christmas after—after Vincent died—and I was all alone. I laid my head down on the open pages of the magazine and—I couldn’t cry, but the great ache that filled my throat nearly choked me. And by and by I got up and put the magazine in the fire. ‘A man has no business to write a thing like that!’ I cried, ‘It’s hard enough and lonesome enough, life is, without tormenting people with his Brushwood Boy!’ But afterwards I sent and bought another copy, and kept it always by me, and—by and by I began to believe!”

She was holding his face against her breast with a divine tenderness. “Now,” she went on, resolutely but as if the resolution took all her strength, “we’ve found each other, and nobody was ever, ever, ever so happy as we are. And yet——”

“And yet—?” he echoed.

“And yet there’ll be so many heart-hungry nights when my work is done and I want you, and your work is done and you want me. I suppose if it were not so we shouldn’t have been given this,—this wonderful thing that’s happened to us. It

Felicity

wouldn't do, I guess, for us to have so much happiness, such perfect companionship, and mock the lonely world. It is a lonely world! Nearly everybody in it has an intolerable heart-hunger and I suppose it's good to be hungry with them, sometimes—they won't have our ministry unless we are. I think I can see, dear, why—why things are as they are with you and me—one keeps one's fellowship with the world, so—and one must do that! Love dies when we deny other claims than its own; we'll deserve better for our love, we'll be true to our work. Oh, give me courage to believe this, darling—courage to go on!"

The little clock, inevitable belonging of her dressing-case, chimed seven and startled them from their firelight communion.

"You haven't had your dinner!" said Morton, self-reproachfully.

"But I've had the most beautiful honeymoon that ever was in all the world," she murmured, standing up and reaching up her arms to wind them 'round his neck, "and now, I'll try to make other folks a little richer for my happiness."

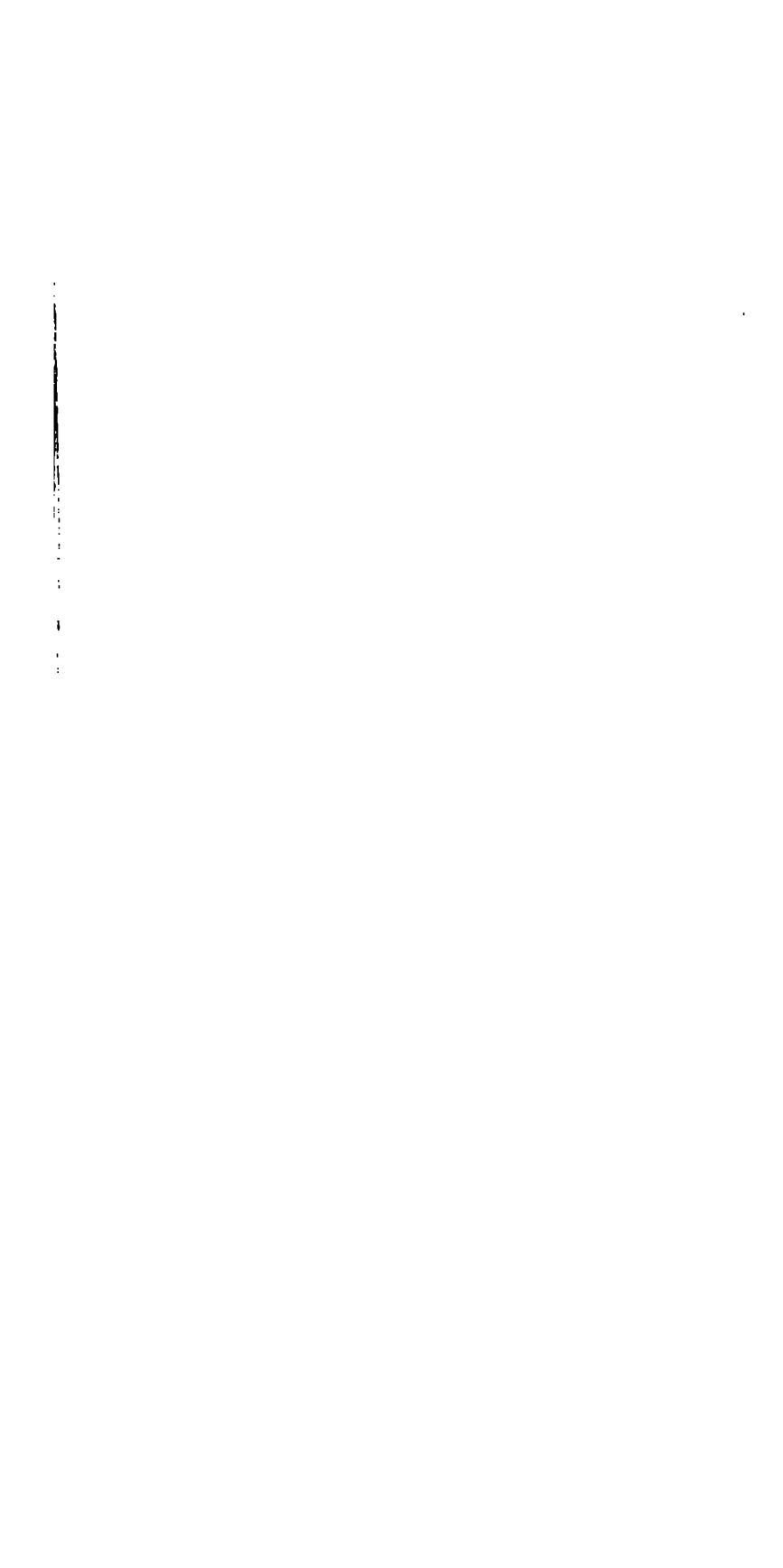
THE END





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